



The Crash

IRKA Newsletter
IRKA
April 2008



IRKA Updates

Inside this issue:

The annual Board of Directors meeting for the IRKA was held at White Oak Conservation Center over the weekend of February 8-10. With a welcome respite from cold weather, the board quickly went to work on issues ranging from membership, website additions, keeper development program, elections, incorporation of our organization, and planning for the 2009 Workshop. We also welcomed two new members to the Board of Directors! Dr. Susie Ellis, Executive Director of the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) has graciously agreed to be our new program advisor. Dr. Ellis is proving to be an invaluable asset to our organization, and will be helping us wade through the daunting task of incorporation. Our newly appointed board member David Geurkink, from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, brought a new perspective and enthusiasm to two long days of meetings.

We also had the opportunity to get an update from Steve Shurter, Chair for the Rhino Taxon Advisory Group. Our hope is to develop a sustainable relationship that will provide opportunities to increase our knowledge and expertise in the management of all species of rhino in captivity. In addition, we as keepers can provide invaluable assistance in research projects, and help promote conservation and education of our zoo guests with guidance from the Rhino Tag.

Our focus then turned toward the next workshop which will be held at Busch Gardens! It's hard to believe that it will be our sixth workshop. Derek Weatherford has been hard at work pulling together the details, and people that are required to produce this event! A rough outline of the workshop was developed, and we also got a preview of the workshop logo (which is really COOL!).

Once again, our sincerest appreciation goes out to White Oak Conservation Center for allowing us to hold our bi-annual meetings at their awesome facilities! With our heads full of ideas and tasks to accomplish when we returned to our zoos, it was then time some serious work.... Visiting with the RHINOS!!

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SAVE THE DATE

6TH Rhino Keeper Workshop
Busch Gardens, Tampa, Florida
May 17-21, 2009

Board Members from left : Randy Pairan, Adam Felts, Vickie Steele, Derek Weatherford, Lance Aubrey, David Geurkink, Dave Clawson, Wendy Shaffstall, Christine Bobko, Dr. Susie Ellis and Jane Kennedy

From the Editor:

Greetings from Denver! Ah, Spring is in the air!! No more heavy coats, scraping ice and shoveling snow... (hopefully) In this issue, we have several important updates on elections and new programs for our membership. Also, we would like to encourage members to use our new e-mail address : internationalrhinokeeperassoc@gmail.com With this new address you can update the IRKA on happenings at your facilities such as births, deaths, animal transfers, ect., and also request information from the list serve. We will then take that information and put it out to other members on the website, and for use in The Crash. Remember, we are always looking for articles, papers and pictures for the newsletter! Knowledge is power!

Best wishes!
Christine Bobko





In Memory of Dr. Nico Van Strien (1946–2008)

Too soon, the rhino world has lost another great conservation leader. Dr. Nico Van Strien, 61, IRF Asian Program Coordinator, died peacefully on February 7th in Dorn, the Netherlands, following a year-long battle with cancer. "Nico", as he was known to colleagues was, without a doubt, the world's authority on both Sumatran and Javan rhinos, having studied and authored numerous scientific papers on both species. He dedicated more than 30 years of his life to rhinos.

Dr. Van Strien earned a M.Sc. in 1971 at the Free University of Amsterdam, and a Ph.D in 1985 in Agricultural Sciences from Wageningen University, Netherlands. His doctoral dissertation work, for which he spent 5 years in and walked 3800 km through the Gunung Leuser Ecosystem, remains the definitive work on the ecology of Sumatran rhinos. Nico worked in a number of countries during his career, including in Malawi where he worked as a biology lecturer at Chancellors College. He also provided critical technical advice to IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. As Chair of the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group over the past several years, his tireless efforts were instrumental in helping people to work together for rhino conservation throughout Southeast Asia, including convening experts working on greater one-horned rhino in India and Nepal last year so that cross-boundary conservation efforts between the two countries could take wing. Dr. Van Strien was a long-term member of many other distinguished organizations, chairman of the Van Tienhoven Foundation for International Nature Protection, serving on the Board of the Netherlands Committee for International Nature Conservation and the Golden Ark Foundation, and as a member of the IUCN Tapir Specialist Group, the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Säugethierkunde, and a life time member of the Malawi Wildlife Society.

Nico officially served as the International Rhino Foundations (IRF) Asian Rhino Program Coordinator from April 1998 to January 2008, but worked as an advisor for several years before that. He deftly coordinated our work through Asia, including Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Malaysia and other countries. Along with IRF's late Program Director and one of his dearest friends, Dr. Tom Foose, he was responsible for the success of our rhino conservation programs in Indonesia, including Rhino Protection Units in Bukit Barisan Selatan, Way Kambas, and Ujung Kulon National Parks, as well as the Sumatran rhino sanctuary, a captive research and propagation facility in Way Kambas. "There is no doubt that both the Sumatran and Javan rhinos survive today because of Nico's deep knowledge, passion and vision for their conservation," said IRF's John Lukas.

We will miss Nico's dry sense of humor, his straightforward approach to life, and his dedication to and love for rhinos and the people who work so diligently to save them. To those who had the chance to work with him, he always seemed happiest when near wild rhinos - wandering in deep forest or boggy wetlands in his characteristic t-shirt, shorts and flip flops— looking in all directions for rhino sign. His enthusiasm and deep knowledge engendered deep respect from colleagues worldwide and will be forever missed in the conservation world.

Nico is survived by his loving wife, Tineke van Strien-Reijgersberg, and sons Maaarten and Willem. The IRF and IRKA sends its most profound condolences to Nico's family, and we want them to know that all of his colleagues and friends around the world share in our sadness over this untimely loss. Nico's spirit will live on in IRF's future endeavors with Asian rhinos.

The IRF will establish a scholarship fund in Nico's memory. For additional information, please contact Dr. Susie Ellis at s.ellis@rhinos-irf.org. Memorial comments may be posted on IRF's website (www.rhinos-irf.org) If you would like to add a photo of Nico to our gallery, please send it directly to me.



Saving Sweetwater's Rhinos : By Michael Skidmore

In September 2007, I was lucky enough to be part of an EarthWatch (EW) expedition in Kenya. "Saving Sweetwater's Rhinos". I work at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago in the Regenstein African Journey area, working with 1.1 Black rhino. The area around Sweetwater was recently opened up to combine wildlife, tourism, and cattle in what is now called the OI Pejeta Wildlife Conservancy. This is great news for the rhinos since they went from having 22,000 acres to around 90,000 acres to roam. The conservancy more than doubled their number of rhinos, taking in around 40 rhinos from areas that had reached or exceeded their maximum carrying number. The conservancy now has 75 black and 5 white rhino, plus hopefully a new calf or two.

For anyone not familiar with EW they are a non-profit organization that supports scientific research in a variety of fields by offering volunteers the chance to join research teams around the world. Experience is not necessary, and unlike many other volunteer opportunities there is not a large time investment. Most teams operate from one to three weeks. The cost may be higher than other projects, but that money is what funds the research, and in most cases expenditures are tax deductible in the US. Go to www.earthwatch.org for specific details.

Through a combination of luck, timing, perseverance and some very nice people, I was able to go on this expedition for a fraction of the actual cost. I had saved up my airline miles for years for something like this, so I just paid \$99 for a plane ticket to Kenya. I ran into Mary and Bruce Feay who run the Chicago branch of EW during a lecture at the Field Museum, and they generously offered to sponsor me! They paid the almost \$3000 expedition fee. The fee includes travel from the meeting site, emergency travel insurance, and meals while you are on the trip. You do have to get to the meeting site on your own, usually located in a major city nearest the research area. I also received funding and paid days off from Lincoln Park Zoo.



The OI Pejeta Conservancy is being run and monitored to maximize the rhino population. All animals except the rhinos can leave the conservancy, a very simple combination of posts and a steep rock wall keeps the rhinos in. About 1/2 of the rhinos have transmitters located in their horns for radio tracking and others are ear notched. The rangers and guards in the conservancy are remarkable, almost uncanny in their ability to not be seen and to just show up wherever you might be. You learn to trust their judgment quickly since there is some element of danger. The original title of the expedition was "Walking with Rhinos", but after the population of rhinos was increased there had been too many close calls in the thick brush, so volunteers do not accompany the rangers on foot when they are looking for specific rhinos. The rangers for the most part carried rifles that could only be fired once before having to reload. With so many rhinos in the area poachers are always a possibility. While on foot we had close encounters with male lions, a female black rhino with a calf, and a herd of buffalo that stalked us for about 1/4 mile.

Among the duties I performed were game transects: Walking around 5-8 miles using a GPS and counting anything in sight. We also had the fun job of counting elephant dung piles, again using a preset course, we counted any piles within 5 meters of our path. An important task is measuring vegetation growth and destruction, especially involving acacia trees. Other various tasks we performed were measuring previously recorded acacia tree plots for growth or damage, counting acacia seedlings in new plots, and counting types and measurements of other types of vegetation in new and old plots. Since the research area is now almost 4 times larger there is a lot of work to do and data to be collected. At night we went on night drives spotlighting wildlife and entered the data collected that day. We went out on rhino patrols with the rangers, starting with climbing a hill and using radio tracking to see which area of the park the rhinos were located. The new rhinos stayed put for the first six months, but now are starting to expand their territories and look for mates. If the rangers had not seen a particular rhino for a while, they would try to see it with the naked eye. The conservancy has a "tame" black rhino, Morani, which is kept in a 60+ acre enclosure (if only all rhino exhibits were so big!) due to injuries suffered in a fight with another male. One job was for us to follow him and record behaviors, one team observed him using his horn to pull down out of reach vegetation. He was twirling his horn and winding the leaves around his horn. All this work is done in the shadow of Mt. Kenya while being right on the equator.

This was my third EW expedition. I also went on a "Mexican Forest Carnivores", and "Eucalyptus Forest Life" expeditions. I recommend an EW trip to everyone. You go to out of the way places, see animals in the wild that you work with, and meet interesting people and gain a lot of experience. The best thing that happened is that the Feay's and Lincoln Park Zoo have started the Feay Earthwatch Grant which will send a member of our collection staff on an expedition each year with approximately 80-100% of the trip paid for, depending on where you go, and which expedition you choose. Anyone who would like more information about EW can contact me at mksidmore@lpzoo.org.



Facility Focus: San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park

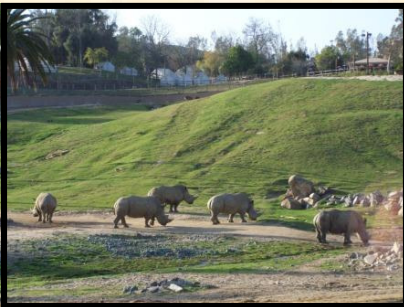
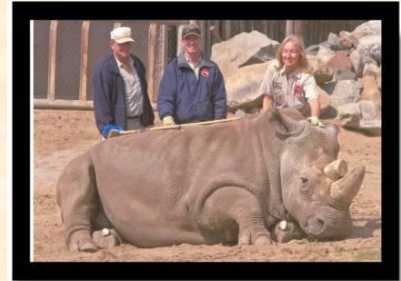
By : Lance Aubery and Jane Kennedy

Rhinos have always been a high priority at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park. Imported Southern White rhinos were the cornerstone species that brought public interest to San Diego's North County in the early 1970's. Since opening in 1972, this 1800 acre animal park has been a success with respect to its primary goal of reproducing large mammals.

Success has also brought many challenges. In the 1970's and 1980's the Southern white rhino reproductive output was outstanding. In the late 1990's, as our white rhino reproduction slowed, our greater one-horned rhino population blossomed. Both surges in rhino numbers forced upgrades and expansion of rhino holding facilities. Multiple rhino shipments each year has been the pattern for most of the park's existence. Several different structures have been used to help get rhinos into crates. Some have worked well, others not.

We have shipped out individuals of four different rhino subspecies over the years. Eastern black rhinos, Greater one-horned rhinos, Southern white rhinos, and Northern white rhinos have all been transported from our facility to destinations on other continents. White rhinos have accounted for most of the travel, so lets look at their facilities first.

For the entire history of the Park, white rhinos have been housed in large multi-species exhibits. White rhino "cage mates" include giraffe, oryx, wildebeest, waterbuck, and buffalo. These diverse displays have ranged in size from 60 to 100 acres. The perimeters of these areas have been defined by block walls, sprayed concrete walls, large cattle guards with chain link fence, and even railroad ties with chain link used years ago. The white rhino holding areas were 1/4 acre yards enclosed by telephone pole fences, plus three concrete block "bedrooms". The old telephone pole yards are long gone, but some of the concrete block bedrooms are still in use today.



Current white rhino holding includes two separate "bomas" or buildings. The oldest boma has a 1/4 acre yard with concrete block walls, plus three polygonal concrete block bedrooms. All three bedrooms are covered. Each room has a built-in drinker. If you look down on the rooms, the pattern looks like a Mickey Mouse head drawing. In this pattern, the area between the ears is a crating alley. The alley has doors to all 3 rooms plus the adjacent yard. For loading rhinos, the crate is secured inside the yard where it is pushed up flush with a metal sliding door to the central alley. Rhinos are crate-trained by giving them access to the crate from the rooms and alley. Food is used as the motivator to get them into the crate.

Our second white rhino boma is a very new structure. It was built for rhinos, giraffe and antelope. There are two adjacent 1/4 acre yards, each with adjoining covered rooms. The yards are side by side with the rooms sitting along the same side of the yards. In between the rooms are alleys leading to a giraffe tamer and a rhino chute. Both the giraffe and rhino containment devices have scales built into the floors. Most of our Southern white rhinos are not very tame, so rhino confinement in this boma has been an infrequent event.



Facility Focus: San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park



The Greater one-horned rhino boma is located in a 40 acre multi-species exhibit. These Asian rhinos share their home with Indian gaur, blackbuck, Persian gazelles, and several species of deer. The rhino boma has sections that are very old and added sections that are new. There are two large yards and five covered rooms. Recently, three hoofstock rooms were added to this complex. The two yards are connected as are the five covered rooms. The two end rooms have common doors with the respective yards. The best part of this boma is the rhino crating area. There is a 12 foot concrete block alley off one of the rooms. The alley has two medication windows and the floor area can be used as a foot bath. A rhino crate is attached to the end of the medication alley for shipments.



The last area I will mention is our black rhino complex. When the Park first opened, black rhinos were displayed in one of our large multi-species exhibits. This was a short-lived situation as it became clear that our black rhinos needed a separate enclosure. The black rhino exhibit is two acres with a sprayed concrete perimeter. Off exhibit, are three concrete block yards, each about 1/5 acre. Also, a 1/4 acre yard with cable barriers is attached to one of the block yards. For years we had to immobilize black rhinos and move them to another area for crate-training. This past year we modified a pass-thru alley between two block yards where we can set a crate and properly crate train and ship rhinos from this area.

The rhinos at our facility run the entire spectrum of personality traits. Because they are housed in very large spaces, some of the rhinos behave as if they just arrived from Africa. At the opposite end of the behavior scale we have a rhino that you can walk right up to, and give her a scratch behind the ear. It is this diversity of rhino personalities, and accommodations that makes the Park's rhino keepers feel like they have the best rhino experience in the world.



Cincinnati Zoo Update

Update from Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden:

As you are aware, for a number of years we have been working to develop an artificial insemination procedure in Indian rhinoceros (The Crash; volume 2, issue 1 – August, 2007; pages 5-8). Dr. Monica Stoops, reproductive physiologist with Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden's Center for Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW), developed the technology for cryopreserving Indian rhino semen and has also formulated a thawing process to maintain maximum sperm motility for the insemination process. As keepers, we have numerous responsibilities in addition to successfully training, through operant conditioning, these Indian rhinoceros females to allow the artificial insemination procedure without the use of anesthetics. The success of this program is a unique collaboration of scientist, dedicated rhino professionals, and veterinarian. The result of this cooperative effort we achieved the first successful Indian rhinoceros pregnancy through artificial insemination, using frozen-thawed sperm.

However, on 5 January 2008 a devastating loss occurred. The 16-year old dam, "Nikki", began showing signs of restlessness Saturday morning and proceeded into labor early that evening. Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden staff was prepared and implemented our parturition protocol developed for this birth and at approximately 10:50 pm the 492-day wait was over and a female calf was delivered. Unfortunately, the calf showed no signs of life and resuscitation measures were unsuccessful. It was determined that the calf was stillborn.

We wish to express our sincere thanks for the outpouring of support and sympathy we have received after our tremendous loss. This tragic end will not over-shadow the monumental scientific breakthroughs and achievements the team has made and we will continue our efforts to conserve this endangered species.

Indian Rhino Artificial Insemination Team:



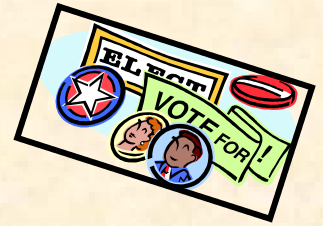
Pictured left to right:

Randy Pairan, Wendy Shaffstall, Dr. Monica Stoops, Renee Carpenter,
Steve Yelverton. (Team member not pictured: Jason Faessler)

IRKA Board of Directors Elections

The International Rhino Keeper Association (IRKA) is holding its 2nd annual election for the Board of Directors (BOD). The IRKA Election Committee is seeking dedicated individuals for nomination for three BOD positions in 2008.

The Election Committee is accepting nominations for the BOD from April 15 to May 15, 2008. The election will take place in July and the results will be announced on August 1, 2008. The BOD positions will begin on September 1, 2008, and last three years. This year the three positions to be voted on are currently filled by Brooke Squires, Jane Kennedy and Wendy Shaffstall. All are available to be elected for an additional term, however, Brooke has chosen not to seek re-election. Thank you Brooke, for all that you have done for IRKA.



Nominations must be made in accordance with the bylaws, Article VI, Sec . 5:

- Any professional member in good standing may submit nominations for another professional member in good standing.
- Nominations received must be accompanied by the written endorsement of at least one professional member in good standing, who must not work at the same institution as that of the nominee.
- No more than two members of the Board may be from the same institution.
- Professional members must be willing to abide by the bylaws, meet criteria in Article VII, and support the code of ethics governing the organization.

Nominees must be willing to share their knowledge and expertise to benefit the organization while participating in annual BOD meetings. BOD will be dedicated to ensuring the IRKA is progressing towards its goals, and be accountable to the membership. As an organization, we need all BOD input to improve the future for all species of rhinoceros as well as directly addressing conservation, education and captive management issues.

When making nominations please include your name and contact information along with that of your nominee(s). Nominees will be contacted to accept their nomination. They will also be asked to supply a brief bio prior to the elections to better inform members about their qualifications. Please send names and e-mail/contact information of willing nominees between April 15 and May 15, 2008 to Election Committee Chairperson, Dorothy Forman, at: clarra13@juno.com

IRKA was created to benefit rhinos and rhino keepers worldwide. The nominations and election process is an opportunity for all members to have a voice. Please take this opportunity to become involved in the development of IRKA.

Dorothy Forman, Election Committee Chair



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Keeper Development Program Scholarship Information

The IRKA is please to announce the implementation of a keeper professional development funding program. This will enable individuals who are interested in this program, the opportunity to received limited reimbursement for their expenses. This program will give those that may not receive full funding from their institutions the chance to gain knowledge and experience working at participating institutions.

Individuals will need to download and complete a funding program application from the website at : rhinokeeperassoication.org and submit them to Chairperson, Randy Pairan.

Keepers who receive this financial support will be required to submit a brief synopsis of their experience to *The Crash* for inclusion in a future issue. Hopefully, this program will be an incentive for those of us that want to expand our bubbles!



Institutional Supporters

The Supporting Institutional Membership is for any conservation organization , or zoological institution which supports rhino conservation in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These memberships are available for \$100, \$200, \$500 and \$2000. Why should your zoo be interested in joining on this level? If your institution contributes on the \$500 level then all rhino keepers membership fees at your zoo are waived! It is important that as the IRKA grows that we continue to garner the support from all facilities that are responsible for the protection and management of all species of rhinoceros. We would like to extend our appreciation for this substantial support to the following institutions, and hopefully we can add your zoo to this growing list! If you have questions about institutional memberships or any other questions please contact us at

internationalrhinokeeperassoc@gmail.com.

Partners



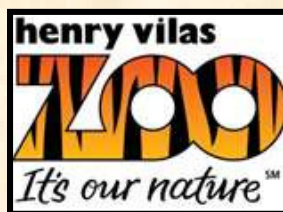
Corporate Sponsors



2008 Sponsors at the \$100 level



2008 Sponsors at the \$500 level



2008 Sponsors at the \$2000 level



The IRKA board members would like to extend our deepest thanks to White Oak Conservation for graciously continuing their support by hosting our bi-annual officers meeting at their beautiful facilities!