

Cutting Edge Conservation

LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

Jim Haigwood • Los Angeles Zoo

Keepers at LA Zoo have been participating in BFR for six years now, and through our hard work and dedication we have now been able to raise \$217,000 for BFR's conservation partners. As a result of this success and my co-workers' kindness, I was lucky enough to be awarded an honorary trip to Kenya to visit BFR's primary beneficiary, the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy.

While I have given a number of talks over the years about the work that BFR and Lewa do, it was both educational and rewarding to see this operation firsthand. Having visited a number of critically endangered species around the world, it never ceases to amaze me how human settlements are pressed right up against these animals' habitats. Lewa understands this and has been doing cutting edge work on the community conservation front.

Lewa has realized that in order for the animals to be safe, the community has to value their presence. In order to accomplish this, Lewa has set up hospitals, schools, nutrition programs for children, wells that provide clean drinking water, loan opportunities for women to start businesses, and law enforcement to help patrol not only the park but also help the community. They are also working to reduce underage pregnancy and STDs. These tangible benefits have motivated the community to work with Lewa to come up with solutions instead of retaliating when human-wildlife conflicts occur. The communities also provide invaluable intelligence about potential poaching events. Lewa's success on these fronts has become a model and mentor for a number of other conservancies in the region and continent as well. From these relationships the Northern Rangelands Trust, a consortium of nineteen community-based conservancies, has been formed.

Due to the excellent security staff that works at Lewa and the community cooperation, there has not been a rhino poaching incident this year and they have reached their carrying capacity for rhinos. Fortunately, Lewa has an outstanding relationship with Borana Conservancy, a neighboring conservancy, and they

will be taking down the fence that divides them. This will further increase their rhino carrying capacity.

While elephant poaching has become an epidemic in Africa, there has not been an incident at Lewa this year. Likely as a result of this safety, elephants are migrating to Lewa in record numbers. Lewa has had to set up "exclusion zones" with hot wire around prime black rhino habitat that would allow the rhinos to enter but keep out the elephants. Sometimes elephants will use their tusks to take down these barriers. In these instances they have to shorten the tusks on these "trouble makers." The level of hands-on-management that is required at Lewa to manage their wildlife left a significant impression on me. At times I could see parallels with the way we manage animals in zoos. At Lewa, when some of the critically endangered species like the Grey's zebra get injured they have their veterinary staff medically intervene. They are also currently hand-rearing three black rhinos due to a multitude of issues, including the loss of a mother to a poacher's bullet.

I have to admit that prior to arriving to Lewa out of pure ignorance I wondered to myself, what would the caliber of the staff be there? What level of talent could they possibly attract in the middle of Kenya? I have to say that I would be blessed and privileged to stand beside any one of those individuals and call them a co-worker. You hear their commitment in their words and you see it in their eyes and actions. I have to imagine that one of the ways that Lewa is so financially efficient is by hiring top-notch people and creating a culture of excellence and stewardship.

During my week in Lewa I got to meet so many people that were very talented at their jobs. There are so many that stick out like Ephantus, who on a shoestring budget used a lot of ingenuity and passion to help put together the incredibly clever Conservation Education Centre. This center was full of hands-on learning opportunities for children from all over Kenya to learn from and get a greater appreciation of the natural world around them. Then there was our guide Michael, who was as passionate



Photos by George Stoneman



about knowing the mammals around Lewa as he was about the birds, and was trying to learn more about the plant life. Many of you have likely seen the informative and visually appealing website and brochures that come out of Lewa. Wanjiku, their talented Communications Officer produces these. You can see the dedication and inspiration in every facet of the operation at Lewa. As an animal person, it is easy for me to focus on the animal aspect of Lewa. Having experienced it firsthand, I have come to realize that Lewa is as much a story about the animals as it is about the people that work at Lewa and the local community. It gives me great optimism to know their message and community-based conservation approach is spreading around the region. Having visited the programs in Indonesia that IRF supports in 2012, it is great to have seen firsthand what an incredible and efficient both of BFR's biggest beneficiaries are.

While there are many depressing stories with conservation, I actually left Africa much more optimistic than when I arrived. What we have to keep in mind is that relying on governments, conservation organizations, and wealthy individuals, is not enough to save the biodiversity crisis that is occurring. It is incumbent upon all of us to be part of the solution. Even though we have much to be proud of regarding our past BFR success, we must find ways to support them even more. Lewa is a beacon of hope for black rhinos, Grevy's zebras, and African elephants. Their success is helping to motivate others to follow suit and use their formula for success. IRF is not only helping to save the last stronghold for Javan rhinos, but their numbers are actually increasing with their help. I find it incredibly rewarding to know that our conservation partners are committed and even more importantly they are effective and proven. 🐘



Photo by Jim Haigwood

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BFR SUCCESS!

Jim Haigwood • Los Angeles Zoo

I'm often asked by other AAZK Chapters what has been the secret to AAZK/LA's success with Bowling For Rhinos over the last few years. I wish there was a simple recipe for that success, but it doesn't exist. I am convinced more and more that the secret to a successful Bowling for Rhinos event is effort, the amount of people involved with putting the event together, time invested in the event, and perseverance. That being said, here are a few components to our event that I believe have been critical to our success.

Initially when I started planning AAZK/LA's first BFR event I wanted to reach out to the local community and get them as much involved with this event as possible. In order to accomplish this, I wanted to have as few teams filled with animal keepers from my institution as possible. Out of the roughly 360 people we had bowling at last year's event, less than 10% were animal keepers from the LA Zoo. I'm not saying to not allow animal keepers to bowl at your event, but I would be concerned about how many people you will have in attendance and how much money you will end up generating in the end. Try and think outside of the box when it comes to filling up your alley. There are the obvious people to invite like docents/volunteers and other divisions within your institution. Then there are the less obvious places to look for bowlers like local art museums, natural history museums, science centers, etc. Many of their employees are interested in helping worthy causes. Perhaps there is a company in your area that supports community involvement. They may allow you to come and speak or distribute information about your event. One year I was lucky enough to come speak at a local movie studio's monthly community outreach meeting. That year one-third of the teams at our event were filled with employees from the studio. Some still come to our event even though it has been five years since I last spoke there.

Possibly join forces with other nearby AZA-accredited zoos, aquariums and animal facilities. Over the last six years now we have had participants from six AZA-accredited institutions and five facilities that hold animals participate in our event. Perhaps by combining your efforts with another nearby AAZK Chapter you can increase the size and impact of your event by working together. We have been lucky enough to see the commitments of many other local AAZK Chapters to this fundraiser grow and help us

over the years. The first couple of years the Orange County AAZK Chapter primarily just bowled at the event. They now help us setup, raise money and get lots of great silent auction items for us. The Santa Barbara AAZK Chapter has also been a great partner and not only sends teams down to bowl, but they also donate some amazing silent auction items. Our event would not be the same without their contributions.

Not only would I suggest getting docents, zoo volunteers and other zoo employees to bowl, but I strongly suggest trying to include them in your AAZK Chapter's BFR planning committee. Many of them may have a lot of great connections or experiences putting together fundraisers. The first two years of our event a docent put together our silent auction. I didn't have any experience doing this and she was a real pro. Our event is a much stronger event to this day because of that help.

I highly recommend building a strong relationship with the Bowling Alley. I will never forget how difficult it was initially to try and get a bowling alley to allow us to hold our event at their alley. Finally, one said yes and it has been a beneficial relationship for both parties ever since. The staff at the alley really get into it. They paint their faces to look like animals, wear costumes, advertise for our event and even more importantly they now fundraise for us as well.

The final most important thing to remember when trying to put together a highly successful event is that it won't be easy; you will have to follow up on things continuously and under no circumstances can you become disheartened or discouraged.

Almost nothing worth doing is easy and this is no exception. The natural world is being ravaged and there are amazing animals that are going to be lost for eternity unless we draw a line in the sand. Please remember the hardships that our conservation partners are taking. The rangers that patrol the parks we are supporting are literally risking their lives to protect the animals there. The reality is that dedicated animal care professionals like ourselves are going to have to be the ones to help protect the natural world, because if it is not going to be us who will it be? 🐘



(Right) Bowling team at the 2013 LA Zoo BFR (Left) Dr. Dedi Candra of the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary at the 2013 LA Zoo BFR. Photos courtesy of Bill Konstant.