

# The Bartlett Society



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# **Impressions on a Survey Documenting the Rhinoceros in Captivity**

*by Dr. Kees Rookmaaker*

**There have been at least 2439 rhinoceroses kept by humans from early times to the end of 1994, in 501 collections spread over 79 countries. That is the summary of my new book to be published later this year by SPB Academic Publishing in Holland - the Bartlett Society Newsletter will keep you informed. While the book will give information about each individual specimen, here I would like to share some impressions of the difficulties and excitements encountered while collecting the data.**

My first step was to sit with a computer, design a database and enter all available information of any rhinoceros in captivity, i.e. place of exhibition, dates, age and the like. There was no need to start from scratch, because I could use the papers compiled by Richard Reynolds in 1960 and 1964 for the International Zoo Yearbook, and the published studbooks of the black and white rhinoceroses from Berlin, of the Indian rhinoceros from Basel, and the Sumatran rhinoceros from the International Rhino Foundation. The second step was to write to each zoo, safari park and dealer in my list asking them if the data which I had collected about their institution were correct. This presented the first hurdle, because where do you find the addresses of all these places around the world. the obvious place is the list of zoos in the IZYG. This was quite helpful and gave me contacts for most but not all collections. The problem is that many indications of localities in the studbooks and some other publications are too short, while some other institutions may have ceased to exist. I have still not been able to identify the names of rhino owners in Margarita (Argentina), Brunkensen (Germany), Yoshikawa (Japan), Maputo (Mozambique), and Pusan (South Korea). Having listed the addresses, I sent my questionnaire to 267 collections known to have shown at least one rhinoceros.

The next months were quite exciting, because I received 109 replies (41%) from all over the world with many beautiful stamps. Some of these letters were quite wonderful, with all kinds of additional information about the maintenance of the animals, post mortem reports, old press cuttings and photographs. On the negative side, it must be stated that over a hundred collections keeping an endangered species like a rhinoceros did not even bother to acknowledge a serious enquiry. Zoos are supposed to be guardians of the wildlife entrusted to their care, serious in their attempts to breed, responsible in keeping records of provenance and age, playing a role in education of the public and assisting the progress of science. If you exhibit a black rhinoceros, it is important to know whether it came from Tanzania or Namibia or Cameroon, because it may not be wise to interbreed subspecies. In fact, such information is only demanded and recorded by a minority of zoos. Somebody wrote to me apologising that they did not keep such records, because he worked in a poor place. Yet, endangered species are taken from the wild to be kept there, with the rationale that this is a contribution to nature conservation. Personally I believe that zoos and other animal collections can indeed play a very valuable role in the preservation of rare species, but it needs an overall commitment which would include refusal to buy animals from unknown sources, a study how to maintain and feed the animals in the best way, proper registration and regular communication of all details to the studbooks and other such programs, co-operation to ensure that animals are kept in the correct family structure (many zoos continue to show single specimens), and certainty that surplus animals are sold to collections or dealers with the same strict standards.

It has been a real challenge in my survey to get information about animals shown in travelling menageries and circuses, both historically and current. For most existing circuses, one may not even know where to send an enquiry. In historical perspective, travelling collections like that of Wombwell or Barnum and Bailey are very hard to study because the documentation may be kept in archives and libraries in all the towns visited by these showmen. Especially for the European continent, this remains a practically unresearched field. To the zoo historian, the three Asian species are the most rewarding subjects, with 397 Indian rhinos shown since 1515 (first birth 1824), 22 Javan rhinos since early times

(a very rare exhibit!) and 96 Sumatran rhinos (only 4 recorded births, from 1872). The bulk of the data concerns the 775 black rhinos (292 births since 1941) and the 1105 white rhinos exhibited since the second world war (including 479 births since 1967). My (futile) attempt to be comprehensive was checked and assisted by Marvin Jones, Heinz-Georg Klos and Richard J. Reynolds. ■

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**Kees Rookmaaker's book "The Rhinoceros in Captivity" is hardcover, with 410 pages and 166 illustrations. It is now available from the publishers SPB Academic Publishing, P.O. Box 97747, 2509 GC The Hague, Holland. The price is to be confirmed but will be approximately 220 Dutch guilders .**

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**RHINO RANCHING - A Manual for Owners of White Rhinos. by Dr. J.G. Du Toit.**

**Published by the South African Veterinary Foundation.**

64pp. and profusely illustrated. £25.00, which includes postage, from The Rhino and Elephant Foundation, P.O. Box 381, Bedfordview 2008, South Africa.

*Review by C.H. Keeling :*

The title of this innovative work might raise a few smiles, until it is realised that large numbers of this once seriously endangered species are kept on private ranches and estates - in fact there is now an African Rhino Owners' Association with a thriving membership. However, there is so much valuable veterinary information within its pages that it should be in every zoological garden - anywhere - that exhibits this now ubiquitous species.

There are authoritative chapters on habitat requirements, social behaviour, reproduction, management, capture, health and mortalities, politics, finances and "why rhino ranching?". The latter brings up some thought-provoking points, such as the value of tourism, although the trendies - or armchair conservationists, as the book more charitably calls them - will be horrified to read about the advice on trophy-hunting.