

CHEETAH/RHINO DISPLAY IN LION COUNTRY SAFARI

By:

Don Dietlein

Lion Country Safari, Inc., has four drive through preserves in the United States. The philosophy of the company is to display animals on large tracts of land in as near natural circumstances as possible. The viewing public is confined in their automobiles on asphalt roads. Since cages are not used, mammals such as leopards and small carnivores are not exhibited.

Cheetah and White Rhino are excellent animals for the drive through preserve philosophy. They are not aggressive toward the vehicles and are compatible in large numbers.

In zoos, cheetah have been kept in paddocks for many years. The usual size of the paddocks go from a fourth of an acre (Kansas City) to five acres (San Diego) with all gradations between. White Rhino are usually displayed in pairs in a heavily bared paddock or in a moated area, either way the available area for the rhino is usually less than an acre.

In 1972 Lion Country opened their two latest parks, Grand Prairie, Texas and Atlanta, Georgia. During the planning stages of these parks, Bill York, who was born and raised in Africa, designed an area in each park to hold the White Rhino and cheetah in the same paddock. Because of his past experience, he expected no adverse interaction between the species.

The cheetah-rhino section of each park consists of approximately 114 acres of dense woodland, surrounded by a 12 ft. chain link fence. Ponds and streams are abundant.

There are holding areas in the section to isolate sick or injured animals. Rhinos are fed on concrete pads spread throughout the section, these pads are moveable.

When the cheetah first arrived, they were held in a holding pen 100 ft. by 100 ft. During feeding the ranger would blow a harsh, loud whistle. After several weeks the cheetah were released from the holding pen, the rhino were previously introduced to the area. The cheetah were called back into the holding pen in the evening by the whistle and fed at that time.

At present, the ranger parks his vehicle in the section and whistles. The cheetah run to the vehicle and are fed 1/4 lb. chunks of meat. This is done four to six times daily. The ranger will locate the majority of the animals, he then drives to distance of 500-1000 yards and out of sight of the cheetah, whistles and the

Consolidated Proceedings of the 1973 Regional AZPA Conference

cheetah locate him and come running within seconds. Only when the weather at night is expected to be below 40° F does the ranger "whistle" his animals into the holding pen in the evening.

The cheetah are fed throughout the day to keep them active. Locating and being first to the vehicle means first fed, therefore, the animals run upon hearing the whistle. Every morning the ranger drags an object, such as an old tire, through the sections, the cheetah will chase this object for about 1 miles, which ensures sufficient intense exercise needed by cheetah.

There is no adverse interaction between the rhino and cheetah. If a rhino wanders down a path and meets a cheetah, the cheetah will move when the rhino is within 25 yards, although cheetah when called will pass through an area the rhino are feeding. Cheetah-rhino behavior may be described as avoidance of confrontation.

The rhino are usually seen in small groups, 2 to 5 individuals, and although basically each group seem to have established large loosely defined areas, this may be due to the spread of the food pads. There are definitely individual favorite resting/sleeping areas. Further observations are needed to work out behavioral patterns of these animals in Lion Country Safari.

When first introduced in the area, the cheetah traveled and stayed together as a group. Recently it has been noted that singles, pairs, and small groups are separating from the large group, which is more typical of their natural behavior.

Because of the natural water holes in the Texas cheetah/rhino section, three hippos were introduced into that area. The hippo travel throughout the section, and can be seen in different ponds on different days. Obviously the deeper ponds are more frequented than the shallower ones. Again, there is no competition between these animals and the other species. The mixture of cheetah, rhino and hippo appears to be mutually stimulating and is certainly very satisfying to see. Because of the success so far achieved it is intended to add more species to this area in the future.

The following slides were taken at the Texas and Georgia parks.