

The Rhino Resource Center Rhino May Day : by Jane Kennedy

In November of 2007, I was invited to speak at the 15th Annual Rhino May Day to be held at the Huxley Conference Theatre of the London Zoo. Dr. Kees Rookmaaker of Cambridge University, Director of the RRC, extended this invitation asking me to represent both the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the IRKA. (Adam Felts was going to attend also, but fatherhood took precedence!) I was to be the first non-Zoological Society of London ex-situ speaker to present a paper to this prestigious conference. On May 14th of this year, as vice-president of the IRKA, I was able to share our goals for the IRKA with the participants. I also spoke on the successes of the San Diego Wild Animal Park's rhino breeding program - the most successful in the world with 160 births to date. It was a great day of informative talks and provided me with the opportunity to connect with other rhino professionals and enthusiasts, many of which had not heard of the IRKA. Over 100 people from Europe, Asia, Africa, and two people from the United States participated.

The day was organized by the Rhino Resource Center in conjunction with Save the Rhino International and the Zoological Society of London. Focusing on in-situ programs, the talks highlighted diverse subjects in rhino conservation. The plight of the western black rhino was discussed, (now considered extinct) as was the work by Esmond Bradley Martin on the decreased use of rhino horn as jambias in Yemen. Abstracts of the papers presented during the Rhino May Day are available at the Rhino Resource Center's website: <http://www.rhinoresourcecenter.com/about/rhino-may-day-2008.php>

My primary purpose was to connect the audience with the IRKA. I shared our goals to make meaningful contributions to the care of in-situ and ex-situ rhinos. Additionally, I spoke about the IRKA sponsored biennial workshop that brings together rhino professionals from around the world to help disseminate information. Our workshops are much like the Rhino May Day, only longer and more geared toward ex-situ rhinos. The Rhino May Day has traditionally focused on in-situ projects. Additionally I shared about the IRKA's recently adopted Keeper Development Program to help develop hands-on skills within the zoo-keeping community. Several European keepers expressed interest in participating in the program.



Dr. Kees Rookmaaker and Jane Kennedy



Jane and other May Day participants Cyrielle and Irelk



Jane and Dr. Rookmaaker at Cambridge

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Prior to the conference I was able to visit the Port Lympne (sounds like "limb") Wild Animal Park (a private preserve established on the estate of John Aspinall) and the Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, which is a part of the Zoological Society of London. While visiting Port Lympne, I discussed black rhino health and nutrition issues with the rhino staff. One discussion with Paul Beer – the lead rhino keeper – regarded eosinophilic granuloma syndrome (EGS) which can be fatal in black rhino. He related that one of Port Lympne's females had suffered from EGS and that the staff had found a successful steroid treatment for her condition. In keeping with the missions of the San Diego Wild Animal Park and the IRKA to share knowledge and experiences of other keepers, I was able to suggest similar treatment for our black rhino in San Diego. The staff of both facilities worked together to come up with the best plan possible for the San Diego rhino. Our bull rhino has responded very well to the treatment suggested by the staff at Port Lympne, and we are very grateful for their help. In addition to the sharing of professional knowledge, the staff highlighted their successful black rhino breeding program, having had 10.19 calves born at their facility - a captive record. Nutrition is suspected in their bias towards female calves, but that's a later discussion.



Port Lympne lead rhino keeper - Paul Beer



Port Lympne Zoo



ESG syndrome in Black rhino



Black rhino butts on parade!!



Jane with Black rhino at Port Lympne

At Whipsnade, I visited with the keepers of the greater one-horned Asian rhinos and the southern white rhino collections. Whipsnade has had its best success in multi-generational southern white rhinos, a rarity in captivity. They have also had success breeding GOHA rhinos as well. One keeper from Whipsnade has even started the process of coordinating a trip to the San Diego Wild Animal Park next year to participate in the Keeper Development Program. He will be joining the IRKA, and hopes to get the Zoological Society of London to join as a Supporting Institution. When they do join, it will bring our SI memberships from England to three, joining both the Paignton Zoo and Cotswold Zoo. Hopefully they will encourage other European Zoos to join our truly International Rhino Keeper Association!

Serving as your Vice-President and being a liaison for the IRKA while visiting a number of zoological institutions has been my pleasure and a privilege. I encourage all of you to spread the mission, vision, and good work being shared through the International Rhino Keepers Association as often as you can by visiting other facilities during your travels. I hope to host one of you soon at the Wild Animal Park.

Whipsnade Wild Animal Park



Nepal exhibit



Kaya and mother Goalpara



Whipsnade rhino keeper – Joy



Beautiful view from Whipsnade



Jane with some GOH's



GOH exhibit