



The Crash

The newsletter for rhino professionals

IRKA

August 2009

2009 Rhino Keeper Workshop Survey Results

Inside this issue:

The IRKA Board of Directors would like to take this opportunity to thank all Rhino Keeper Workshop delegates who took the time to complete the survey. The Board of Directors will use these results to help improve the content of your workshop.



What was your overall impression of the workshop?

We are pleased that the vast majority of delegates felt the workshop was not only enjoyable, but worthwhile and provided a great opportunity for networking. Many were impressed by the knowledge and professionalism of the delegates attending and this interaction will colleagues give them a lot of ideas to take back to their respective institution. Many of you enjoyed the mixture of conservation and captive management issues that were presented. However, some people felt we needed to improve communication and organization and the BOD recognizes that there is a lot of responsibility placed on the workshop chairperson, so for 2011 RKW, the BOD will be responsible for soliciting presentations, communicating with speakers and organizing itinerary for presentations. There were suggestions to increase the number of speakers and have more diversity (ex – research projects), so the BOD and RKW chairperson will make every attempt to increase the number and variety of presenters for next RKW.



What presentations could make 2011 workshop more effective?

An overwhelming majority of delegates feel that we need to continue with a variety of topics and cover everything from training, medical and breeding; but expand to cover more ambiguous topics such as how to effectively communicate with your boss to get some of the ideas garnered at workshop implemented, geriatric rhino care, shipping concerns and safety considerations, hand rearing issues, etc. Delegates would also like to have roundtable discussions involving exhibit design, mixed species exhibits, equipment design plans (for chutes, weighing platforms, etc.), foot/nail care and fundraising ideas to generate revenue for international projects. And, with increased pressure from management regarding public “presentations” people would like the chance to talk about what behaviors they do to involve the public and how to give effective presentations to the public. There was also an interest in getting an update on rhinos that are either being relocated or released back into the wild as well as linking with RAG/SSP/TAG/AZA and getting updates from studbook keepers. There were also some helpful suggestions involving putting emergency contact numbers on the back of the nametags, including one-day pricing on registration form, and providing information on family activities that may be available in the workshop area.

From the Editor:

Hello everyone!

It was great to see new and old faces at the 2009 Workshop in Tampa, Florida! We have some great news in this issue with the birth of an GOH at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo! Also, the results are in for the elections, and congratulations to Adam Felts, President (Columbus Zoo), Vickie Steele, Treasurer (White Oak), Christine Bobko (Denver Zoo), and Dave Clawson (The Wilds) for their re-election to

Another two year term on the Board of Directors! Also, a reminder to keep those articles, updates and news coming to “The Crash”!

Best wishes,

Christine Bobko



2009 Rhino Keeper Workshop Survey Results

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Please provide any additional comments or observations you feel the Board could utilize to better serve you and reach the goals of the IRKA.

It was suggested that we put the videos of presentations on website and develop a “members only” section on the website, both of these options are actually being investigated by the IRKA Webmaster, Dave Clawson. A suggestion was made to have more information about RKW on the website so the BOD and RKW chairperson will use both the website and newsletter to convey relevant, and timely, information about the workshop to the membership. Numerous people mentioned how interesting it was to hear from the “front line people” in the field and would like to see an increase in their number as well as an increase in the number of international attendees. The Board of Directors would like to thank the individuals who took the time to put an appreciative comment or complimentary note regarding the work we do. However, if you have any suggestions or comments on how we can improve to best meet your needs, please feel free to contact one of us.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo: The birth of a Greater One Horned Rhino

By: Chris Massaro, Assistant Curator of Asia at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

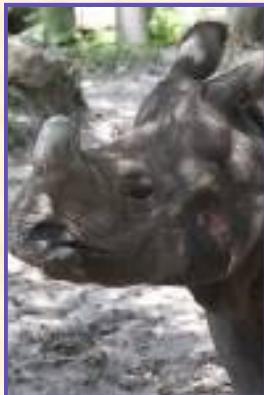


Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo (TLPZ) is proud to announce the birth of our Greater one-horned rhino. She was born just before 7 pm on July 7th and she is the first rhino born at our zoo! Estimated to be just less than 100 lbs at birth, our little girl is growing fast and motoring around her exhibit.

This happy occasion was several years in the making and involved a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication. TLPZ first acquired Arjun, our male, in June of 2001 at the age of three. More than two years later our breeding pair was complete when Jamie came to the zoo from Oklahoma City Zoological Park at the age of two. For the next couple years they lived in different exhibits at the park until the summer of 2006, when TLPZ moved Arjun down to Jamie's exhibit so they could start getting to know each other. For the next several months we kept all the interactions between them through protective contact. Although they were not in together, they could still come nose to nose and nuzzle, lick and even lay side by side next to their gate.



Arjun



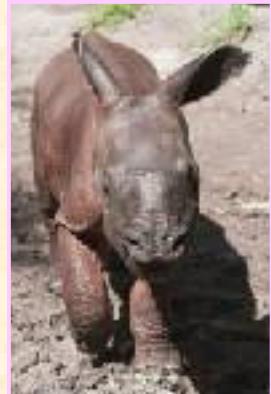
Jamie

In preparation for the introduction, TLPZ added an addition to the rhino exhibit, doubling the original size and designing the exhibit so that it would better facilitate an introduction of Greater One-horned rhinos.

In April of 2007, TLPZ introduced Arjun and Jamie, and they "hit it off" immediately. Within a month of their introduction, they were being kept together 24 hours a day. At this point, we did everything we could do. Now it was up to them to figure things out.

Jamie was very patient with Arjun over the next couple months. She knew exactly what she was supposed to be doing, even presenting to him, but it took him about four months to catch on. After they sorted everything out, Jamie continued to cycle regularly and they were breeding without issue over the next few months, until March of 2008. At this point, everything stopped and we knew it was time to mark our calendars. Sure enough, sixteen months later we had the first ever rhino born at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo.

As we came closer to the birth date, we had more work ahead of us. Although, the exhibit was great for two adult rhinos, we were going to need to do some "baby proofing." The exhibit was already set up so Arjun and Jamie could have their own personal exhibits, but we needed to make sure that the new calf couldn't just go wherever she pleased. TLPZ's Asian Garden's keeper staff went through every inch of the exhibit addressing any areas of concern. The fun thing of course is that we couldn't just "baby rhino proof," we also needed to make sure that our work was "mama rhino proof." When we were finished, we had used thick 4"x6" timbers, 8" round poles, chains, cable and heavy duty straps to fill in any space our little calf might slip through.



It has been just over a month now since the birth and our little girl is doing very well. We couldn't have asked for a better mother in Jamie, who has done everything she was supposed to do and made this entire adventure successful from the beginning. The calf is growing rapidly and getting very active. She and Jamie are now being exhibited for a limited time in the morning as they adjust to their new situation. And what about Arjun? Even though, he can only interact with them through protective contact, he still enjoys nuzzling with the girls at their gate.

Although it took several years and a lot of hard work, the one thing we can say without a doubt is that it was definitely more than worth the effort. The only people who enjoy our new calf more than the zoo's visitors, who gather around the exhibit in massive groups, are the keepers, who have fallen in love with this little girl the moment they laid their eyes on her.

I want to thank everyone who came out to Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo during the IRKA conference and offered their suggestions and advice. We're very pleased to be a part of the IRKA community.

It's a Girl!!

Facility Focus: The Phoenix Zoo—The Evolution of a rhino exhibit

By: Paige McNickle, Senior Keeper Hoofed Stock and Lanny Brown Keeper II

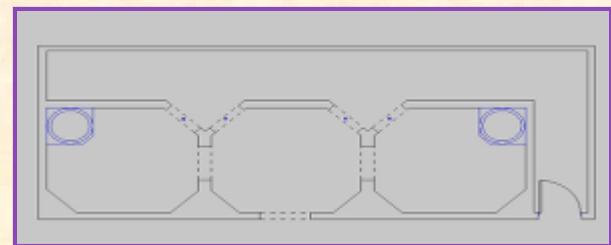


The Phoenix Zoo has exhibited White Rhinos for over 40 years. They have been a premier exhibit animal in our collection for most of the zoo's history. However, as with several zoos that have had large animals for a long time, our exhibit is not perfect and has seen several improvements/upgrades over the years. The first challenge came when our original rhino passed away. The rhino barn is actually under the lion viewing area and the back wall of our barn is the lion moat wall so modifications and expansion in the barn were out of the question. Due to these limitations and the keepers experience with geriatric rhinos, the zoo decided to house geriatric female rhinos. The plan being we were not set up to breed white rhinos, though Phoenix was one of a few zoos to have bred a pair of white rhinos, but we could hold no breeding females and free up room at another facility so they could help the rhino population. We did some upgrades; we added an epoxy coating to the concrete floor and additional drains (the barn only had one drain, we were masters of the squeegee). We also installed a restraint chute, however the rhino access door to exhibit is right next to a block wall, so the chute had to go in at an angle and the wall limits our access to one side of the rhino. To allow people to operate the chute in protected contact we added vertical poles to the area right outside the barn. Our exhibit allows for the public to have a 320-degree view of the rhinos. This being said the rhino access door and chute are below the public viewing area. Shade was added to help with the heat and provide animals and keepers with some privacy and a little relief from the summer heat. All these improvements have been great, allowing us to train the rhinos for blood draws, vaccinations and basic medical exams. Our current rhinos came from the Wilds and before that King's Island. They had always been in large pasture exhibits without close contact from the public. Their arrival brought us challenges we hadn't foreseen, conditioning rhinos for a traditional zoo environment with public in close proximity and having the ability to be above them. We took things slow allowing the rhinos to have access to the barn where they preferred to stay. The Phoenix zoo was without rhinos for two years while the renovations were completed and new rhinos were acquired. Needless to say the people of Phoenix wanted to see the rhinos on exhibit, due to our mild winters the barn has no public viewing as the rhinos are only inside while keepers clean, or when medically necessary. In the winters they have access to the barn with heaters but are not locked in. We had to speed up the introduction due to crowds. They were serviced before the zoo opened and released before the public was in, all their food was given on exhibit. Notch grew accustomed to the public and the routine within a couple weeks, Half Ear on the other hand follows Notch's lead, even now she still doesn't like large crowds of people but she will tolerate them, shifting and training with them around. The overlook is great for the guests as they can see keepers training and working with the animals. The exhibit allows for the public to see them no matter where they want to be.



Two years ago we were posed with another challenge, to remove three large planters so the rhinos could be more visible as the planters were six feet tall. The planters were 40 years old and beginning to fall apart and the rhino's felt the need to help tear them down. The planters housed several trees providing additional shade. We wanted to keep the trees and the dirt mounds that encased the root balls without allowing the rhinos access to the trees. After many options were discussed we decided on large boulders set into the ground. The rhinos haven't moved them but do enjoy the boulders as scratching posts. The boulders and the areas they protect provided a place for the first of the animals to join the rhinos in their exhibit, a pair of Egyptian geese. The geese taught us that they will hang out in a barn stall completely occupied by a rhino. Half Ear and Notch are not as tough as a goose and will be displaced by a noisy persistent goose. Geese will try and run out the drive thru gate keepers use to enter the exhibit. Taking care of rhinos is much more entertaining when keepers have to get geese out of the way first.

Our latest challenge came when we made a commitment to the Antelope Taxon Advisory Group to help the Speke's Gazelle Species Survival Plan. In doing so we are now a designated facility for the holding of surplus males, to increase holding space in other facilities for breeding. To that end, we were given the challenge by our curator to find a way to retrofit our Rhino exhibit to become mixed-mammal species and house Speke's Gazelle.



Barn floor plan





Our first challenge when retrofitting this exhibit for the gazelle was determining the interactions the Rhinos would have with the gazelle. While both animals would be on exhibit together during the day deciding how to house them overnight was an issue. The climate in the Desert southwest is such that we were fortunate enough to be able to leave our Rhinos on exhibit overnight without worrying about them getting too cold most of the year. However, in the winter the overnight lows do dip down enough to warrant giving our Rhinos access to the barn with heat. Up until this point that hasn't been an issue, the geese preferred to keep the rhinos in the barn not join them. Our barn however safe for rhinos and even geese is by no means safe or even useful for small gazelle and allowing them access along with the Rhinos would be a recipe for disaster. Due to these factors it was decided that the gazelle would have to have a separate holding area of their own.

While planning the holding area for the Gazelle we had to address two main concerns involving the Rhinos. First of all the proximity of the holding area to the Rhino barn was a concern. We want to discourage the Gazelle from spending time near the rhino barn/chute area as much as possible for their own safety, so it was decided the best thing was to locate the Gazelle holding on the opposite end of the exhibit from the Rhino barn. This should discourage the Speke's from being around the Chute area and also make sure they are not underfoot when the Rhinos are waiting to be shifted. The second issue we had to deal with was a shift door. Due to the fact that this has always been only a rhino exhibit it is surrounded by a concrete wall and the only gate/door is ~800 lbs and 7 feet wide, not exactly designed for shifting a small, agile, fast animal. Although the cost was a factor it was decided the best thing to do was to cut a hole in the concrete wall big enough for a gazelle that led to a small chute connecting the exhibit to the holding. The hole was then equipped with a sliding door on the side that the rhinos cannot reach. Although the rhinos do still have the ability to get their horns and snouts into the chute the rhinos cannot reach the door to the holding area on the other end of the gazelle chute. Steps have been taken to minimize the Rhinos access to this area (placing large boulders in the way) but curiosity has won out and we have seen both rhino horns in the chute already, in the future if this becomes a problem a more permanent barrier may be incorporated (concrete filled steel posts, ect. 



Removal of planter



Chute before modifications

The other major challenge we had to contend with was Gazelle-proofing the Rhino exhibit. Our rhino exhibit was one of the earliest purpose-built exhibits in the zoo (over 40 years ago) and to that end was made specifically for Rhinos and nothing else. Basically we have a 1/2 acre yard with solid concrete walls all the way around and two large doors, one leading off exhibit for servicing and one leading into the barn; Additionally, in 2004 we added the before mentioned training/restraint chute was added extending from the barn door into the exhibit, and a keeper area (originally built for ostrich, a mixed species option we decided against once we met Half Ear and Notch) was added next to it, both of these areas are inside the Rhino exhibit. While it is ok for the gazelle to go in and out of the keeper area (separated from the exhibit by concrete-filled steel posts 2' apart) we obviously do not want the Speke's to have access to the Rhino chute due to the abundance of small openings that could injure the Gazelle. The secondary benefit of blocking the Rhino chute from the gazelle is that it automatically prevents them from having access to the rhino barn. The barn stalls can fit one rhino comfortably, two rhinos tops, two rhinos and two gazelle- not quite.

Blocking the Rhino chute was by far our biggest challenge; we felt if the geese found the barn and chute interesting the gazelle would also. The first idea was to build a barrier around the chute with a rhino-proof gate in front of the chute door, however this was not cost effective and logistically very difficult. A second idea surfaced that incorporated the chute itself and saved a lot of money and may be a lot of headaches? A small fence was already in place on one side of the chute from the previously mentioned ostrich holding, this fence, when covered with a solid barrier, would effectively block one side of the chute adjacent to the keeper area. The second and third sides were already inaccessible due to the exhibit and barn walls, which left the fourth side of the chute to be dealt with. This was the front of the chute leading onto exhibit. Rather than trying to incorporate a second door in front of the chute door it was decided to use the chute door itself as a barrier. The benefit to this is a significant cost savings and no more exhibit space is lost. The challenge was to design a solid barrier mounted on the chute door that could be removed when training the rhinos in the chute to accommodate their horns. We tried a solid piece and found our rhinos don't fit in the chute if it has a solid front and it would limit access to the front of their horns. Some of the logistics we had to work out included a single keeper being able to open a door that would hold up to a rhino and be safe for a tiny gazelle.



In the end we decided to install 1/8' thick steel sheet on the front of the chute with a hinge on one side and a hinge in the middle, this allowed the sheet to be folded out of the way when working with the rhinos and put back into place when they are on exhibit. Sounds simple but after installation keepers couldn't move the chute door, we had to raise the chute door to allow the chute to be operated by someone other than superman. A small section of this sheet was also installed to fill a 1' gap between the chute and the exhibit wall. The last components installed were two tubular steel frames (similar to that of the pre-existing ostrich fence) that filled the gaps between the chute and the old ostrich fence. All of the tubular frames and the old ostrich fence were then covered with rolled bamboo fencing to prevent the gazelle from going through. All of the bamboo fencing is behind the pre-existing pipe barrier that separated the keeper area so the rhinos cannot reach it with their horns to destroy it, all areas they can reach are covered with steel sheet.

We have turned what was once a single-species exhibit with no flexibility, into a multi-species space that can effectively house two very different mammal species and one spunky avian species together with the goal of educating our public about the co-existence of animals within habitats. The limit space and budget gave the keepers plenty of training in creativity and flexibility, the mixed species help provide all the inhabitants a more enriching life, And the public more interesting trips to the rhino exhibit, or is it the goose exhibit or maybe it's the gazelle exhibit. We can still train the rhinos daily, the Speke's will shift off exhibit so we can train them and keep up with the care retired rhino's deserve.



Chute modifications



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

Partners



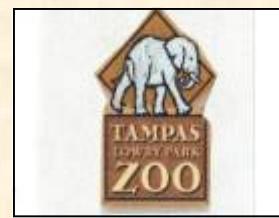
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