

The arrival of Siwa

PHOTOS PONT-SCORFF ZOO



Building within a record time

First black rhinoceros pair in France

Catherine Wardzynski and Xavier Vaillant, Pont-Scorff Zoo, France

We received a fax on 14 April 2002 from the EAZA Black rhinoceros EEP Coordinator, Andreas Ochs of Berlin Zoo, asking us if we were still interested in keeping black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) in our institution, as we had contacted him about this a few years before. And – if yes – whether we were able to receive the first animal six months later! We accepted his proposal the next day. This was the beginning of a wonderful and exciting adventure, certainly the biggest technical, economical and human challenge of the last years for our zoo. This challenge was all the more difficult because the facility had to be built in the very short period of only six months.

Space, comfort and quietness

As the matter was urgent, we decided to build a complete new facility based principally on the recommendations of the EAZA Husbandry Guidelines and on our own experience with large mammals. The house would combine space, comfort and quietness for the animals but also safety and freedom in cleaning and handling for the keepers. The facility was finished within the required time and 'Jakob', an 11-year-old male, arrived on 13 November 2002 from Krefeld Zoo, exactly six months after we started building this facility.

The house consists of three 30 m² stables. Two stables are connected by a sliding door which allows us to create one larger stable. The third stable is completely separated from the others by a concrete wall. However, a window in the wall has a metallic panel that can be removed to allow viewing contact between animals through bars. Every stable has a concrete wall in the backside and a series of 120 mm diameter steel bars embedded in the concrete floor on the other sides. The bars are two metres high and are spaced at 30 cm intervals. All stables have access to the 3,250 m² outside enclosure. The outside enclosure has a natural rock boundary on 80% of the periphery and a 2.2 m high steel bar fence on 20% of the periphery. This area, mainly covered with grass, contains a mud pond. Two areas with African vegetation (protected from the rhinoceros) provide shadow for the animals. The first stable also leads to a 250 m² paddock, fenced by 80 cm diameter bars filled with concrete that extend two metres above ground and two metres below. The bars, spaced at intervals

of two metres, are linked by wire cables all around the paddock. The paddock is completely out of the public view, allowing some privacy for the rhinoceros.

Happy couple

Today, Pont-Scorff Zoo is proud to announce that it is the first zoo in France to exhibit a pair of black rhinoceros. The long-awaited arrival of a female occurred on 9 December 2004, when 'Siwa' (pronounced 'Shiva'), a 12-year-old female, arrived from Dortmund Zoo. Adaptation to her new stable and enclosure took some time. Siwa was initially very nervous, often striking the bars of her stable when her new keepers walked near her. With much patience and devotion the keepers were slowly able to calm Siwa down and desensitise her to all the new stimuli she was confronted with.

After one month, she went out in the paddock of the enclosure without any obvious stress, and after two months she entered the large outside enclosure where she could run and roll in the mud pool. In fact, she was so happy that she did not want to get back in her stable.

Only visual contact has been established between Siwa and Jakob to date but that seems promising. We plan to bring them in physical contact when Siwa is completely adapted to going in and out on time and we can objectively determine her oestrous cycles. Black rhinoceros are solitary animals, only living together during the reproduction period. For this reason we are building a second paddock in the enclosure so they can both be outside while at the same time allowing regrowth of grass in the outside enclosure. •