



The Crash

March 2025 "The Spring Edition"

The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connecting rhino professionals.

President's Perspective

Greetings everyone!

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Crash! I am sure many of us are ready for warmth and sunshine, leaving behind the many shadows of winter.

Time flies because the 2025 Rhino Keeper Workshop is only seven weeks away. Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and the IRKA workshop committee have been working hard to put together a fantastic agenda.

We are excited to welcome our four unique keynote speakers to the workshop this year, including Dr. Monica Stoops, the director of Reproductive Sciences at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, Karen Odendaal - the COO of Zululand Conservation Trust (ZCT), Steve Metzler, the Head of Animal Husbandry at Colossal and Maggie Moore, Development Director of International Rhino Foundation. Each of our keynotes brings a wealth of knowledge and unique insights into the world of rhino conservation. So get ready to learn!

In this edition, we have a great article from Lauren Hines from the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance on complex training for a medical procedure within their GOH crash. I loved reading this article because the rhino they worked with was my first GOH calf at the Denver Zoo! Joona! This article highlights the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and understanding your animals' needs in complex training situations. Bravo!

We have included an update from the International Rhino Foundation on the new rulings and sentencing in the Javan rhino poaching crimes. These new sentences are a testament to the Indonesian government's investment and dedication to protecting this unique species.

IRKA has decided to update one of our key programs with a new name! The TERS program, Training and Enrichment Regional Seminars, will now be called the Regional Rhino Seminars. We wanted to give institutions the freedom to highlight what your program does best in the care and management of rhinos. So, consider being a host in 2026!

Chad Harmon wrote our last article combining his two passions: rhinos and art. It beautifully describes how tattoos can show love and connection to our animals and symbolize the community and our pledge to the care of this incredible species.



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We hope to see you soon in Omaha!

Peace, Love, Rhinos

Chris Bobko

RHINO KEEPER WORKSHOP 2025

**May 18th-21st at
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium**



Keynote Speakers



Dr. Monica Stoops

Monica serves as the Director of Reproductive Sciences at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, where she leads a scientific team focused on advancing research to deepen our understanding of the reproductive biology of key species. This research aims to support sustainable ex situ population management and provide critical data that informs long-term conservation strategies. With over 20 years of experience in zoo and wildlife reproductive research, Monica has developed expertise in rhino reproductive biology. She believes the single greatest asset to advancing rhino research is the rhino keeper community; their skills, knowledge, and dedication make the impossible possible!

Monica is also the Reproductive Advisor for the AZA's Rhino Taxon Advisory Group and Rhino Research Council, as well as Secretary for the AZA's black rhino Saving Animals from Extinction (SAFE) program. She and the team at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium are proud to be hosting the 2025 International Rhino Keeper Workshop.

Karen Odendaal

Karen Odendaal, Chief Operating Officer at Zululand Conservation Trust (ZCT), has been a key figure since its inception. With an M.S. in Resource Conservation Biology from the University of the Witwatersrand, she began her career in 2005 as a Black Rhino Monitor at Manyoni Private Game Reserve. Her role evolved from ecologist to the Managing Director of the Manyoni Private Game Reserve to becoming COO of the ZCT in 2015, focusing on community and conservation projects. She played a crucial role in establishing the Zululand Rhino Orphanage in

2017 and continues to drive initiatives like the range expansion and pangolin rehabilitation programs, fostering ZCT's growth and impact on conservation and community support.



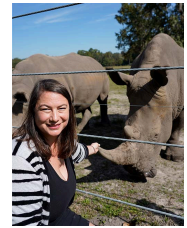
Steve Metzler

Steve Metzler, Head of Animal Husbandry

Steve applies his 25 years of exotic animal husbandry experience and leadership to developing animal care strategies for endangered and extinct species.

Maggie Moore

Maggie Moore has worked for IRF on and off since 2007. As Development Director, she oversees IRF's fundraising activities. She recently took on the role of Deputy Director for the organization. Maggie has nearly twenty years of experience in fundraising and project management with international NGOs.



Training Complex Behaviors in a Complex Environment



**San Diego Zoo
Wildlife Alliance**

Training behaviors provides an opportunity for wildlife to participate in their husbandry care every day. The relationship between animals and the care specialist can be impacted by the environment including the number of animals, variety of taxa, and facility set up. Navigating the successes and challenges we face is where we can learn to improve our training in the future. At the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, we have revamped our training program in the field habitat for our Greater One-Horned Rhinos starting with the foundations of trust and building up to participation. This renewed effort has aided us in responding in a proactive approach to health maintenance, concerns, and even complications. This proactivity helps prepare us for medical intervention when needed, but more importantly provides the wildlife opportunities to learn in a positive manner.

Our facility provides unique obstacles for training Greater One-Horned Rhinos. The habitat is 27 acres and includes 124 other animals that all share multiple wallows, feeding locations, large grazing areas, and a rocky terrain. This expansive space allows us to train from multiple places on habitat, including on the back of trucks and designated protected contact areas. The challenge of having a large habitat when training means we meet rhinos where they are or lead them to where we want to provide the training opportunity.

Recently, our team worked on a dental X-ray behavior with our female rhino, Joona, after her adolescent incisors were not falling out as the adult incisors grew in. When observing behavioral signs of discomfort such as lethargy and teeth grinding, the Veterinary team and Wildlife Care staff created a plan to train for dental X-rays. The behavioral repertoire included desensitization to equipment, positioning her body, and holding still for X-rays. This behavior was challenging from a training standpoint because of working on a complex behavior in a short timeline and social changes happening around her.

In addition to all of the challenges mentioned, the training process took place during the timeframe when introducing Joona to an adolescent rhino, Aalu. Aalu needed a buddy while out on habitat with our other three females and two calves. After the introduction, our team had to learn how to manage working with Joona and Aalu together while slowly separating them for more complex training sessions. We worked through feeding them farther from each other and eventually getting to the point of no longer having to be in the eyesight of one another. This provided both females with an opportunity for reinforcement with their trainer, as opposed to interfering with each other's sessions. We also learned that by providing them opportunities to check in on each other during the training process, trust during separation increased. As their relationship progressed, both Joona and Aalu became more comfortable separating for short periods.



Joona and Aalu at the protected contact training area in the field during an X-ray training session.

Not only were there challenges in the social dynamics of training bonded rhinos, but there was also the added complexity of training on habitat with multiple rhinos. As trainers, we know we cannot remove all environmental distractions. In fact, we expect distractions to happen and reinforcing cooperation builds resiliency in the rhinos. Joona and Aalu were submissive in the crash, so we needed to account for Joona looking out for herself during a session and not putting her in a position of having a negative interaction with conspecifics while training. It is our job as trainers to also be looking out for other rhinos and know the relationships they have with each other to determine when the appropriate time is to call a session. This also involves being patient if Joona breaks cooperation or attention with her trainer to check out her surroundings for her and Aalu. We have found making sure the equipment and food set up is something easily removable helps us avoid rewarding other rhinos for interrupting a session. We are unable to shift all of our rhinos off habitat to accommodate training. A solution to minimize interruption is stationing the other rhinos with food away from the area used for Joona's training and cleaning up the leftover food to minimize associating that location with reinforcement.

After two months and five sessions with vets, we were able to gather quality images of Joona's incisors. This took a team effort to organize the training sessions for the entire habitat, build all the tools to prep for the X-rays, and coordinate between Wildlife Care staff and Veterinary teams to accomplish our goals. After all our success building a plan and completing the behavior, the problem solved itself. The tooth fell out less than one month later without the need for a medical procedure. However, training this behavior in the field taught our team how to work through challenges and has set us up to work on other complex behaviors in and out of the field in the future.



Training Joona during an X-ray attempt. Another rhino pictured in the background stationed with food away from the session.

Lauren Hines
San Diego Zoo Safari Park

More Justice for Javan Rhinos

**Repost of IRF blog*

On February 12th, 2025, a panel of judges at Pandeglang District Court declared six defendants in a shocking case of Javan rhino poaching guilty, and served the official verdicts. Five of the six defendants received sentences of 11 years in prison and a fine of 100 million rupiah (~\$6,130 USD). The sixth defendant, a leader of a poaching network operating in Ujung Kulon National Park, was sentenced to 12 years in prison and a fine of 100 million rupiah (~\$6,130 USD). All of the defendants were charged with "an unlawful act in the form of hunting Javan Rhinos," as well as possession of illegal firearms and machetes.

These sentences follow the surprising precedent set by the first sentencing in the Javan rhino poaching case in June 2024, when a panel of judges' handed down a criminal verdict that was higher than the charges recommended by the public prosecutor and represented the longest jail term ever of a wildlife crime case in Indonesia. These legal proceedings began in the fall of 2023, when authorities discovered

poached rhinos in Ujung Kulon National Park on Indonesia's island of Java and quickly uncovered two poaching groups. The suspects were apprehended and later made a shocking confession of killing between 18- 26 Javan rhinos over the course of five years.



Image courtesy of Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry

"This ruling cannot undo the tragic loss of as many as 26 rare Javan rhinos, but it sets a strong precedent and delivers a clear warning to those who would threaten Indonesia's wildlife," said Nina Fascione, Executive Director of the International Rhino Foundation. "Adequate justice in a case like this is critical to ensuring rhinos are safe from future poaching."

As long-time supporters of Indonesian rhino conservation, IRF commends the thorough investigation that led to this outcome. IRF is grateful to all those involved with this case – the Government of Indonesia, local police and cooperating nonprofits, government agencies, police, local NGOs, as well as community members who spoke out in support of their rhinos. Holding wildlife criminals accountable is essential to protecting biodiversity, and we applaud the dedication of all agencies involved. We encourage them to continue their efforts to uncover the full scope of this crime, ensure that all responsible parties face justice, and implement stronger protections to prevent future poaching in Indonesia.

"Javan rhinos are a large species that reproduce slowly, so it will take a long time to recover from this terrible loss. But we have brought Javan rhinos back from the brink of extinction before, and we will do it again," Fascione said. "Despite this setback, Javan rhinos continue to reproduce in the wild. With stronger safeguards and unwavering commitment, we can ensure their continued recovery. This strong sentence is a vital step toward making sure no rhino in Indonesia is ever poached again."

For more information about Javan rhino conservation please visit the IRF website www.rhinos.org.

Regional Rhino Seminars

(formerly known as T.E.R.S.)

Regional Seminars were conceived during the 2017 Board of Directors meeting to embody the core values of the International Rhino Keeper Association—sharing knowledge and fostering a deep commitment to the care of rhinos. These gatherings hope to provide invaluable opportunities for rhino care professionals to come together, engage in hands-on learning experiences, and enhance their skills in a collaborative environment.



Formerly know as **Training and Enrichment Regional Seminars**, R.R.S are two day events focused on accessibility to keepers at nearby facilities. They are intended as a cost-effective way for IRKA members to continue sharing during years between Rhino Keeper Workshops. The small number of attendees enables hands-on experience that the larger workshops can't always facilitate, and the manageable size allows keepers to gaining experience organizing gatherings within the zoo community.

Why the name change? Because it doesn't have to focus on training or enrichment, you can show off anything you feel your program has to offer! Habitat design, geriatric care, ultrasound imaging.... whatever you would like to highlight. You don't have to be an expert in the field, but **YOU** are the expert on your rhino management.



Oklahoma City Zoo hosts November 2021 Regional Seminar

What is R.R.S.?

Regional Rhino Seminars are 2 day events capped at 25 attendees, and intended for professional members within a 5-6 hour drive.

What would you need to do?

The hosting facility will chose the topic, plan activities and their logistics, suggest lodging recommendations, and identify a point person to communicate with IRKA throughout the process.

What would IRKA do?

IRKA will advertise the event on all of our media platforms, host registration on our website, collect and transfer funds to the hosting facility, offer limited scholarships, and share your success through our newsletter.



North Carolina Zoo hosts May 2018 Regional Seminar

Would you be interested in hosting a Regional Seminar in 2026?

Looking for ideas, inspiration or more information?

Contact jade.tuttle@nczoo.org, or reach out to any of the B.O.D.

A Crash of Tattoos:

The Connection Between Rhino Tattoos and Rhino Keepers



Rhinos hold a powerful place in the hearts of many, perhaps none more than rhino keepers. Among this passionate population, rhino tattoos have become more than just body art; they serve as a deeply personal and symbolic tribute to the incredible animals they dedicate their lives to, care for and often protect.

Rhino tattoos also foster a sense of community among keepers. In a profession often marked by emotional highs and lows, these tattoos create a visual bond, a shared language of pigment, either black and gray or full color, that unites keepers from all corners of the globe. They symbolize not just a connection to the animals but also to a network of individuals who share the same mission, passion and commitment.

For rhino keepers, a tattoo of a rhinoceros often represents their profound connection with the species they care for. By choosing rhino-themed tattoos, keepers immortalize their pledge to these animals.

Each tattoo tells an artistic story. Some designs might feature realistic depictions of rhinos in their natural habitat. Others may incorporate abstract, stylized or traditional elements or personal meanings tied to their experiences. A keeper might choose a tattoo to honor a particular rhino they formed a bond with, to commemorate a significant milestone or as a memorial.



In a career that demands unyielding dedication and persistence, rhino tattoos also serve as badges of pride. Each line of ink and shaded detail becomes a testament to the challenges and triumphs of their work and the intimate moments of care shared with individual rhinos.

For many keepers, the tattoo transcends personal symbolism. It becomes a conversation starter, a way to raise awareness about rhino conservation. These tattoos spark questions and dialogue, providing a visual and creative opportunity to educate others about the plight of rhinos and the importance of action.

As rhino keepers wear their tattoos with pride, they carry the weight of both the animals they serve and the ideals they fight for. In the end, these tattoos are not just about art, they're about the heart behind them.

**If you would like to share your ink and the inspiration behind it, please contact Chad at theartofzootic@mac.com.*

Chad Harmon
Oregon Zoo

Correspondences

Births:

SFossil Rim Wildlife Center ----- male SWR "Turbo"
CERZA Parc des Safari ----- SWR "Akagera"
Pairi Daiza Zoo ----- female SWR "Nova"

Deaths:

SDZ Safari Park ----- female GOH "Alta"
Zoo Granby ----- female SWR "Shaboola"
Zoo Knoxville ----- female SWR "Dolly"
Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens ----- male SWR "Archie"
Louisville Zoo ----- female SWR "Sindi"
Givskud Zoo Zootopia ----- female SWR "Sophie"

Transfers:

CERZA received GOH male "Thanos" from DierenPark Amersfoort
DierenPark Amersfoort receive GOH males "Tarun" and Tican" from Zoo Basel

New Members

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Janel Lefebvre | African Lion Safari |
| Annie Kaspar | Birmingham Zoo |
| Ashley Walsh | Birmingham Zoo |
| Roy Cosner | Blank Park Zoo |
| Logan Hubbard | Blank Park Zoo |
| Bill Flanigan | Fossil Rim Wildlife Center |
| Ashlyn Hall | Fossil Rim Wildlife Center |
| Ellen Tozer | Longleat Safari Park |
| Jacqueline Contino | Miami University |
| Abby Drake | Nashville Zoo |
| Gina Kinzley | Oakland Zoo |
| Peter Oneil | San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance |
| Lauren Hines | San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance |



New Conservation Partner



Conservation Partners are conservation organization or zoological institution which supports rhino conservation in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These partnerships often provide discounts for the supporting institution . It is important that as the IRKA grows we continue to garner the support from all facilities that are responsible for the protection and management of rhinoceros. We would like to extend our appreciation for the support from the following institutions, and hopefully we can add your zoo to this growing list! If you or your institution are interested in becoming a

Conservation Partner, please visit:

[Support IRKA](#)

Platinum Conservation Partners

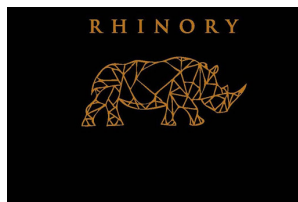


IRKA Partners





2025 Conservation Partners



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