



The Crash

September 2025 "World Rhino Day Edition"

The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connecting rhino professionals.

President's Perspective

Happy Fall season and World Rhino Day month! Hopefully, this finds everyone fully recovered and inspired from our 2025 Rhino Keeper Workshop in Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium in May. What a fantastic workshop! Our thanks go out to the dedicated staff and employees for all the hard work that went into putting on such an event. We had many first-time attendees who were able to network and expand their knowledge on the species that we all love.



Another shout-out to our dedicated Workshop Committee for helping to ensure this workshop was a success. The Fundraising Committee, with the help of our generous donors, helped make this year's silent auction such an enormous success, with over \$6,000 raised that will go towards scholarships and conservation projects. Way to go!

Thank you to all our members who participated in this year's BOD elections! Congratulations to returning members, Pat Fountain, Robyn Lorsch, Jade Tuttle, and a warm welcome to our newest member Charlie Hyde from San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The new terms began September 1st 2025 and will run through 2028.

A great aspect of attending a workshop is the ability to hear and learn from different conservation projects across the globe. Our first article was written from the perspective of four members who had the trip of a lifetime to South Africa on a Katie Adamson Conservation Fund trip this August-September. This trip was possible by connections made at the Omaha workshop and gives a great glimpse into how the trip impacted each person.

Another new initiative that we are working on is our new partnership with KEEP! The article by James Star highlights the keeper exchange programme and experiences that are currently being afforded to keepers in the UK. IRKA hopes to expand this program and US and UK experiences within the next year.

In honor of World Rhino Day, we are excited to release the new exclusive t-shirt design created by our incredibly talented BOD member Chad Harmon that will help show your rhino love! Help spread the message on Facebook, Instagram and get yours today! All proceeds will go to the International Rhino Foundation.

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Our last article deals with critical information from the San Diego Zoo Safari Park on their 2023 outbreak of Vesicular Stomatitis. It provides essential information on disease parameters and vectors, making it particularly important for those living in VSV-prone areas.

Thank you to all our members - you make this a great organization!

Peace, Love, Rhinos

Chris Bobko

IRKA Board of Directors Election Results

The BOD is dedicated to ensuring the IRKA progresses toward its goals, and is accountable to the membership. As an organization, we need all membership's input on our BOD to improve the future for all species of rhinoceros as well as directly addressing conservation, education and managed care issues.

The new terms began September 1st and run through 2028.



WELCOME CHARLIE HYDE!

My career with animals began on a cattle ranch in South Dakota, where I developed a lifelong passion for animal care. Since 2006, I have worked professionally with exotic species, and today I am a Lead Wildlife Care Specialist at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. I currently oversee the care of both of our breeding herds of Southern White and Greater One-Horned Rhinos.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with three species (and a special sub-species) of rhino, the Northern White, Southern White, Eastern Black, and Greater One-Horned. My journey with rhinos began with caring for Angalifu and Nola, two of the last Northern White Rhinos. Both were in their geriatric years when I started and Nola suffered from chronic nail distortions. I was tasked with assisting in her foot care maintenance. That experience not only deepened my connection to rhinos but also sparked a lasting passion for advancing hoof health and welfare.

My commitment to rhino conservation has also taken me into the field. I have been fortunate to visit Ujung Kulon National Park in Java, Indonesia, home to the critically endangered Javan Rhino along with Bukit Barisan Selatan NP and Way Kambas NP (home of the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary), both located in Sumatra. Here, I was able to see, firsthand, the challenges of keeping these species abundant in their native habitat.

I previously served on the IRKA Election Committee from 2013–2015. In 2013, I helped on sub-committees, organizing the workshop hosted by San Diego. This gave me insight into the teamwork and dedication that drives our organization forward. In 2019, I co-hosted a rhino footcare discussion with Dr Oosterhuis at Disney and had the privilege of joining a rhino immobilization panel at this years workshop in Omaha.

As a new member on the IRKA Board, I hope to bring my hands-on experience, my dedication to rhino welfare, and my passion for supporting keepers and conservationists alike. I am committed to fostering collaboration and mentorship among rhino professionals to help ensure we continue to improve advancements in rhino care ex-situ and in-situ.

Congratulations as well to Chris Bobko, Pat Fountain, Robyn Lorsch, and Jade Tuttle for their re-elections to the board.



SAWUBONA!!!

(Hello in Zulu)



At the end of August, I had the privilege of leading 9 (very trusting) zookeepers to the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa with the Katie Adamson Conservation Fund (KACF).

If you attended the 2025 RKW in Omaha, you had the opportunity to meet Dave Johnson, the co-founder of the KACF. Dave is a retired pachyderm keeper from the Denver Zoo who is very passionate about conservation and in 2014 put that passion into action. Please visit www.katieadamsonconservationfund.org for full details of this amazing organization.

If you were also at the RKW in Omaha, you had the opportunity to meet Karen Odendaal, COO of the Zululand Conservation Trust in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. Please visit www.zululandconservationtrust.org for full details about the trust and the programs they offer.

From these two great rhino minds, evolved an epic trip that I was very fortunate to be able to lead.

From these two great rhino minds, evolved an epic trip that I was very fortunate to be able to lead.

Among the 9 keepers that joined me on our adventure, were 3 rhino keepers and IRKA members!

We were not only in South Africa to be on Safari, but we also had a strong conservation focus at the forefront of our minds. We are all aware of the crisis facing rhinos and elephants; human-wildlife conflict, out of control poaching, and habitat loss being some of the top problems for these two species.

Traveling with the KACF, not only provided our zookeeper team the opportunity to see animals in the wild, but to actively contribute to the conservation. At the Tembe Elephant Park, we worked with researchers to track black rhinos and lions that they are actively monitoring. Both species have representatives wearing GPS collars. We were also so proud to have been able to sponsor the purchase of two elephant GPS collars, and the team was thrilled to have been able to actively participate in the applications of the collars during the elephant immobilization.



Kristen's Experience:



Horn trimming has become a very common tool in protecting rhinos from poaching in the wild. We have all read, heard, or researched about its success. I have often discussed this with our guests at the Rhinory, but I had never experienced it myself. This past month, I had the opportunity to visit South Africa and got to see these beautiful creatures in the wild. I had the chance to help with and watch a horn trimming. The rhino monitors chose a candidate, a young male Southern White Rhino. Before heading to the location, the vet did a briefing on what would be happening and the drugs he would use. After the rhino was darted from the helicopter, we arrived on the scene. They identified the rhino, blind folded, and inserted earplugs. After they measured the horn, the trimming began. The whole trimming took under 30 minutes, and the young male was reversed and went on his way. Watching all of this, I understood the importance of the whole experience, especially with the full moon the following week. Holding the trimmed horn in my hand, I found it hard to believe its value. One thing that caught my attention was that the rhino walked to a tree and began to rub. It is so natural for rhinos to shape their horn, but now he was missing his. I was sad to watch him rub and to think what he might be thinking. I wish we didn't have to trim their horns, but accept this is how we protect them.

Stacy's Experience:

Why it's okay we didn't really see black rhinos in South Africa

I tried not to have expectations going into this trip, but if there were two species I really wanted to see it was white AND black rhinos. Black rhinos would of course be trickier to find as there are far fewer of them in this area than

white rhinos, but since it was the end of winter in South Africa - when foliage is at its thinnest - we'd at least have a better chance seeing them.

We started our trip in Tembe Elephant Park, a sand forest ecosystem in KwaZulu Natal, near the Mozambique border. To help monitor them, their small population of black rhinos are fitted with horn pods - radio frequency tracking devices glued to their secondary horn. In the park before sunrise, we immediately began our search for the closest rhino, before he moved off too far for the day. One scan with the telemetry



receiver gave us a general direction to head in, and we were off. To best maintain their wildlife's natural behavior and the habitat itself, vehicles are limited to existing roads (sand paths), so if we were going to see a black rhino on the move, we'd need to catch him near a road. A few minutes later, a second scan from a different spot allowed our guide to triangulate a more precise location for our rhino, however as the beeps were changing in volume he could tell the rhino was already up and on the move. We'd try to head him off before he crossed the road from one block into another, much larger block of land. Every few minutes we'd stop for another scan to make sure he was moving in the same direction but when we checked, he had changed course. We'd back track a few times and after about an hour of being definitely within his ear shot, it was clear he gave us the slip and snuck off into the big block unseen by any of us. We'd move on to tracking lions (and being tracked by elephants!) for the rest of the day. The next morning our rhino was still in that large block of land, we drove the perimeter to see if we could spot him on our way to a marshy area of the park, but he was too far in. We'd need to wait until we got to Manyoni to see rhinos on this trip.

Our first morning staying on Manyoni Private Game Reserve, we got up well before dawn for the long drive to Zululand Rhino Orphanage. It was dark and we were still bleary-eyed but suddenly up ahead we saw our first rhinos of the trip! They were running across the road, but we could tell that it was a black rhino mom and calf (probably 18 months to 2 years)! As we got closer to where they crossed all we saw were their butts running side-by-side as they disappeared into the brush. It all happened too quickly for anyone in our group to even try for a photo, but it was seared into our memories, and we took it as a good sign for our next 6 days on the reserve. During our game drives over the next few days, we saw giraffe, lions, cheetah, hippos and even a leopard. We saw about a dozen white rhino, with calves of all ages...yet the black rhino were proving to be elusive here as well. On one of our last evening game drives, our guide picked us up with a lead on a black rhino. She had spotted him near a water source a few hours earlier and suspected he was still nearby (the rhinos here do not have tracking devices). We found a few footprints and scoured the recently burned scrubland. Our group of 10 had never been quieter or more focused than that drive - cameras in hand, silently peering through trees, listening for the crashing of branches caused by a rhino on the move. Due to the landscape of that area, there were only so many places he could have gone. He wasn't far, but that rhino likely knew we were there and stayed out of sight. Our efforts weren't wasted though, within minutes of moving on (after realizing we were outsmarted again by a black rhino), we were stopped in the road by a small group of white rhinos, who were completely unbothered by us, and let us hang out in their presence for a good 20 minutes.

It's easy to be disappointed that during the whole trip we didn't get a better look at black rhinos, but looking back I'm actually okay with it. In both locations it wasn't that we couldn't find black rhinos, it's that they knew there was a vehicle nearby and were actively avoiding us. Yes, black rhinos are making a rebound, their populations have been steadily increasing since the 90s, up now to an estimated 6,800 individuals. But they're still a fragile species and still considered Critically Endangered by the IUCN because if any of the management or protection efforts in place stop - the population would likely crash again. That's how persistent poaching still is, even with hopefully the worst of the poaching crisis behind us, parks and reserves still can't afford to let their guard down for a day. So, for me, as much as I wanted to come away from this trip with the perfect photo of a black rhino, I'm just as glad knowing they're out there thriving, and doing their best to avoid people.

Sydney's Experience:

One of the highlights of the trip was going and helping at the rhino orphanage and then being asked to come back a second day! It was a very bittersweet experience, both heartbreaking and heartwarming at the same time. Learning about the orphans' individual stories and seeing the results of what poaching can leave behind is very sobering. Then seeing firsthand how, when given the chance, they can bounce back and support each other through the process is so heartwarming and inspiring. All of them have so much personality and it was a joy to watch them just being rhinos with each other. It also really solidified the fact that in the fight against poaching, individuals matter and every single rhino counts. It felt good to be able to use the skills we have as zookeepers to help out at the orphanage with all of their husbandry routines. Ten extra sets of hands really goes a long way when caring for that many rhino babies, especially on deep cleaning day. It also gave me an appreciation for the resources that we have at our facilities here in the States - from the tools and scales that we use on the daily to our easy access to each other and collaboration. The simple things we take for granted in our every day routines can go a long way in a place like the rhino orphanage. Of course meeting a bunch of baby rhinos was very fun, but maybe even more impactful was meeting and working alongside the human staff at the orphanage. The people that dedicate so much of themselves to helping these orphans get through the worst days of their lives. The people that



give these babies the tools to not only survive but to thrive. Even though most of what we did there would be considered "work" it was truly a privilege and I walked away a better rhino keeper for it.



I wanted to remind the membership about the incredible opportunity that Karen has offered to ALL IRKA MEMBERS: If you are wanting to do a volunteer experience (minimum 2 weeks – maximum as long as you want!) at the Zululand Orphanage, she has offered a 15% discount on the foreign/International rates!

For more information on the Zululand Rhino Orphanage volunteer program, head to this link:

<https://zululandconservationtrust.org/conservati>

It truly was the trip of a lifetime... and I'm hoping to lead another one in 2026!
I'd love to have more rhino keepers join as it is a rhino focused trip!

Keep watching social media posts and the winter edition of the CRASH for more details.

If you are interested in joining the trip, you can email me at: ihearthrhinos@gmail.com

Silent Auction at RKW a Success!



The Fundraising Committee is still buzzing from the amazing results of our silent auction and raffle night

We are thrilled to be able to continue supporting keepers as some of this money will go toward

during the gala at the Rhino Keeper Workshop!

Another HUGE thank you to the Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium and to all the amazing keepers and staff who played such a big part in our event going off so smoothly!

We also need to recognize all the support we received from our donors. We put out the call for donations and they responded with some fantastic and unique items. We are so grateful and thankful to them. If you were one of the donors

THANK YOU SO MUCH - YOU ROCK!

scholarships and the rest will be donated to rhino conservation!

If you attended the workshop and want any information about an item donated to the event, feel free to reach out to the fundraising committee and we can connect you to the donor, they would love your support.

If anyone would like to join the fundraising committee team, please reach out to us as well, we would love to have you!

We had some fantastic items to auction and raffle off and due to the generosity of the folks in attendance, we were able to raise a stunning \$6408.00!!!



Keeper Education Exchange Programme **"K.E.E.P"**



KEEP, or the Keeper Educational Exchange Programme, is a small, UK-based, not-for-profit organization which aims to improve knowledge and experience exchange within zoos/safari parks and improving job satisfaction as a result by connecting zoos through formalized keeper exchange placements.

At KEEP we believe that every keeper should have an equal chance to develop themselves and their expertise, in turn benefitting the animals in their care as well as the animals at the other zoo. There are no barriers of "knowing the right people" or working at a large collection to participate in the programme – registration is free for both keepers and collections, with the only stipulations being that applying keepers must be employed in a zookeeping role and have at least 1 year's zookeeping experience.

One of the biggest supporters of KEEP has been my own employers; Chester Zoo. We have 10 different animal teams that are organised by taxonomic groups, looking after a massive animal collection ranging from Asian elephants to Bermuda snails. This gives a massive scope for keeper exchanges due to the sheer variety of species involved and I am proud to say every animal department has done at least one exchange per section since launching here in July 2023!

I work on the primate team at Chester Zoo and as a result we were the guinea pigs for the programme here. We've since had 6 keepers on placements who have all had a great time and been able to take back a variety of new ideas to the benefit of their animals and colleagues. Other animal teams promptly joined in which really gave the programme a shot in the arm and lots of keepers from all around the country applied to take part! Our most popular ever placement in terms of applicants in this country was 3 days with our parrot and penguin team back in 2023, so it's not just the charismatic megafauna that's proved popular!



Speaking of charismatic megafauna, the Chester Zoo rhino team hosted Amelia from Hertfordshire Zoo for a few days where she got the opportunity to work with Eastern black rhinos and Indian rhinos for the first time! "I had a great time at Chester working with the rhino team. Meeting all their amazing animals and learning how to work with new species was a fantastic experience. I would highly recommend this to any keeper as it is a great way to network and overall, very educational and fun! Thanks KEEP team!"

Amelia at Chester Zoo

The rhino team not only hosted Amelia but they also sent Rachel from their team on a placement with the rhino team at Flamingo Land. "Everyone was really nice, and they also took the time to show me the white rhino section in addition to my time with the black rhino team. I was able to help implement some new enrichment for the rhinos and got to take part in the black rhino training. I really enjoyed the placement and found it insightful and valuable!"



Rachel at Flamingo Land

Following the construction of the new Heart of Africa section at Chester Zoo, further rhino placements are in the pipeline at Chester Zoo soon! Beyond Chesters there have been several other zoos doing keep placements involving rhinos such as the West Midlands Safari Park, Whipsnade Zoo and even Parc de Branf  r   (France) to name a few! We have had keepers from across the UK working with the 3 rhino species in captivity here and sharing best practice and ideas all for the benefit of rhino welfare!

I hope these experiences whet your appetite, KEEP is always looking far and wide to find the next exciting exchange opportunity. We are launching KEEP AAZK this year and working away at getting placements worldwide soon, so KEEP your eyes peeled for future rhino related opportunities! To find out more about us please visit our website: www.keeperexchange.org.

James Star
Chester Zoo

IRKA World Rhino Day Fundraiser

limited edition shirts



front image

When you purchase a t-shirt or hoodie from this campaign, 100% of the proceeds will be donated to the International Rhino Foundation (IRF)

to support the incredible work they are doing to save all 5 species of rhinos from extinction.



The IRF focuses on **Protection, Habitat Restoration, Community Support, Conservation Breeding, Demand Reduction, and Research**. They support programs in India, Java, South Africa, Sumatra,

We are excited to announce
our new International Rhino
Keepers Association shirt for
World Rhino Day 2025 -
Let's make everyday
World Rhino Day!

This amazing shirt will be
available starting September
22nd. With only two weeks to
grab yours you won't want to
miss out!

Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. There are currently less than
28,000 rhinos remaining on the planet. That's it.

By purchasing this International Rhino Keeper
Association (IRKA) **Limited Edition** shirt, you
are joining the fight to stop the poaching crisis and
supporting these vital rhino protection programs.

The mission of the IRKA is to promote Professional
expertise to develop and share the best practices for
managed rhino care and contribute to
conservation. Thank you for your support!

**LETS MAKE EVERYDAY WORLD
RHINO DAY!**

Buy yours today

Rhino Research Review:

Vesicular stomatitis virus in two species of rhinoceros at a California zoological park

Vesicular stomatitis is a disease commonly reported in equids with documented cases also reported in a number of livestock and domestic species. It is caused by exposure to the vesicular stomatitis virus (VSV), a vector borne pathogen found in Mexico and other regions of Central and South America and documented in the southwestern United States. In May of 2023, following a winter with higher-than-average rainfall, two rhinoceros species at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park exhibited symptoms consistent with VSV, representing the first documented cases in a non-equid Perissodactyl species. In their case report on the suspected San Diego VSV outbreak, Berlin et al (2024) describe symptoms presented by greater one-horned and southern white rhinoceros as primarily being lesions on the skin (coronary bands, heels, soles and skin folds) and on mucous membranes (lips, nostrils and within the mouth). Other clinical symptoms included difficulty eating, hypoxia and lethargy. PCR testing of lesions from 20 rhinos confirmed presence of VSV in 10 individuals, with those testing positive eventually clearing detectable viral levels in 9-25 days. Treatment of lesions included a variety of analgesics, topical wound care, topical insecticide and in two individuals, systemic antibiotic treatment. Although this VSV outbreak had high morbidity, no mortalities occurred, which is similar to what is documented in cattle and horses. Preventing future outbreaks of VSV can prove challenging as little is known, especially in rhinoceros, about long-term immunity. Therefore, the authors conclude that vector control, vector exclusion and vector surveillance, especially during the warmer months, in VSV-prone areas.

This article is open access and can be found here: <https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/ajvr/85/5/ajvr.23.12.0284.xml>

Reference

Berlin ER, Kinney ME, Howard LL, Perrin KL, Rodriguez P, Kubiski SV, Phair KA. Vesicular stomatitis virus in two species of rhinoceros at a California zoological park. Am J Vet Res. 2024 Feb 24;85(5):ajvr.23.12.0284. doi: 10.2460/ajvr.23.12.0284. PMID: 38382199.

Correspondences:

Births:

West Midlands Safari Park ----- female GOH "Nurani"
Zoo Krefeld ----- male black rhino "Billie"
Safari West ----- male SWR "Ozzy"
The Wilds ----- GOH birth
West Midland Safari ----- GOH birth
Zoo Planckendael ----- male GOH "Amari"

Deaths:

Patna Zoo ----- GOH "Ayodhya"

San Diego Zoo Safari Park -----female GOH "**Tanaya**"
Yorkshire Wildlife Park ----- male black rhino "**Jasper**"
Potter Park Zoo ----- female black rhino "**Doppsee**"
Adventure World ----- male SWR
Lee Richardson Zoo ----- male black rhino "**Jabari**"
Parco Natura Viva ----- SWR male "**Benno**"
Paignton Zoo ----- male black rhino "**Manyara**"
Port Lympne Safari Park ----- female black rhino "**Rosie**"

Transfers:

Blank Park Zoo received black rhino "**AJ**" from **Cincinnati Zoo**
Zoo Knoxville received SWR males "**Mylo**" & "**Ranger**"
Zoo Knoxville received SWR males "**Liam**" & "**Gus**"
Zoo Granby received SWR females "**Alice**" & "**Hazina**" from **San Diego Zoo Safari Park**
Cameron Park received SWR "**Mosi**" from **Virginia Zoological Park**
Safari Madrid received SWR male "**Tayo**" from **Colchester Zoo**
Ellen Trout Zoo received SWR male "**Chitabe**" from **Lion Country Safari**
Boulder Ridge Wild Animal Park received GOH male "**MJ**" from **Tanganyika Wildlife Park**
Wilderness Wildlife Center received SWR females "**Holly**" & "**Livia**" from **San Diego Safari Park**

New Members

Tashawna Spell ----- Buffalo Zoo
Jackson Tucker ----- Wildcare, St. Louis
Joshua Sydney-Smith ----- Wildcare, St. Louis
Sarah Kucharski ----- Wildcare, St. Louis
Daneille Athens ----- St. Louis Zoo
Jamie Lombardo ----- Wildcare, St. Louis
Katie Sipra ----- St. Louis Zoo
Sara Burran ----- Wildcare, St. Louis
Rachel Paper ----- Zoo Knoxville
Ana Maria Pellat ----- Zoologico Guadalajara
Henry Cheyenne ----- Ft. Worth Zoo
Taylor McInroy ----- Wildlife Safari
Steven Kienlen ----- Oklahoma City Zoo
Logan Hall ----- Fossil Rim Wildlife Center
Luke Glendenning ----- Taronga Zoo
Michelle Griesinger ----- Cincinnati Zoo
Jim Cronin ----- International Rhino Foundation
Joe Henry ----- Associate veterinarian
Melissa Clements ----- El Paso Zoo
Parker Pennington ----- Colossal Science Foundation
Pablo Roger ----- Zoo Miami
Danielle Denninger ----- Toledo Zoo
Kat Perry ----- Seneca Park Zoo
Chris Cadieux ----- Buffalo Zoo
Jon Holtcamp ----- Buffalo Zoo
Beth Phethean ----- Yorkshire Wildlife Park
Alyssa Lehman ----- San Diego Safari Park



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](#)

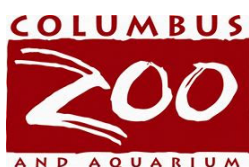
Platinum Conservation Partners

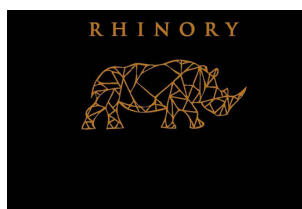


IRKA Partners



2025 Conservation Partners





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