

The Crash

July 2026 "Summer Trial Edition"



The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connection rhino professionals

President's Perspective

Happy summer, everyone!

I hope you're staying hydrated, enjoying some sunshine, and finding plenty of ways to beat the summer heat.

First up—our Board of Directors elections are just around the corner! Voting will take place July 28 through August 11, and your participation plays an important role in shaping the future of IRKA and the programs that make our organization so special. Every vote matters, so be sure to cast yours!

I'm also excited to highlight this edition's Facility Focus, featuring the incredible team at Nashville Zoo. Nashville has long been recognized for its successful Southern white rhino breeding program, and they're now taking on an exciting new challenge by integrating two groups of half-brothers into a developing bachelor herd. Jacob Norris provides a fascinating look at the exhibit's innovative design, management strategies, and the integration process. Congratulations to the Nashville team! I'm confident we'll all gain valuable husbandry techniques and behavioral insights from watching this young bachelor herd develop over the coming years.

Another initiative we're proud to continue expanding is the IRKA Keeper Professional Development Program. We're thrilled to welcome the African Rhino Protection Initiative (ARPI) in Bellevue, Texas, as our newest partner facility. Logan Hall from Fossil Rim Wildlife Center recently participated in the program through an IRKA scholarship, and in this issue he shares how the experience strengthened both his knowledge and practical skills. I encourage every member to take advantage of this unique opportunity to learn from fellow professionals and broaden your experience with rhino management.

Planning is also well underway for the next Rhino Keepers Workshop, taking place May 17–21 at the Jacksonville Zoo and Botanical Gardens! Our planning committee has some exciting experiences in store, and we can't wait to share them with you. Keep an eye out for registration information as we move toward the end of the summer.

Finally, on behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Jason Faessler, who will be stepping down from the Board in September. Jason, thank you for your years of dedication, enthusiasm, and unwavering commitment to IRKA and rhino conservation. Your positive spirit has left a lasting mark on our organization, and you will be greatly missed.

And, of course...we love you, Jeff. 🥰

PEACE, LOVE, RHINOS

Chris Bobko



This edition of the Crash is a trial run for a change in our newsletter platform. If you have any articles you would like to share with our members please contact jade.tuttle@nczoo.org

The International Rhino Keeper Association

Board of Directors Elections

It is time for the annual election for our Board of Directors! 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.

Nominations have been collected by the election committee. The four nominees with the top votes will hold positions on the BOD for three years. You must be a professional member current on dues by July 15th to be eligible to vote.

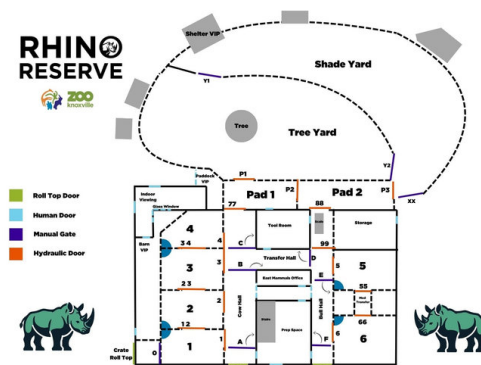
Voting will begin July 28th and close August 11th

New terms begin September 1st

IRKA was created to benefit rhinos and rhino keepers worldwide. Have YOUR voice heard!

Participate in the 2025 BOD election process and the future of the IRKA.

Knoxville Zoo's Facility focus



Zoo Knoxville has a long history of housing Southern white rhinos. Our first herd of 5 arrived in the mid-70s and we've housed them continuously ever since. After decades of successful breeding, our herd moved into their retirement stage in 2015. When our last original rhino, Dolly, died in 2025 at the extraordinary age of 56 1/2, we were ready to welcome the next generation of rhinos to Knoxville.

Pervious to the development of our new rhino habitat, the decision was made to move our elephants to the Elephant Sanctuary in middle Tennessee; the former elephant barn was chosen to become the next home of rhinos. Transitioning from old ladies to young bulls was an exciting idea for all of us but we knew that it was going to require a shift in mentality. And a lot of barn modifications!

Luckily, we began the planning process while at the 2023 IRKA Rhino Keeper workshop, which meant we had plenty of resources to draw from. We are so grateful for all of the help we've received from this community along the way. At the workshop, we sought out zoos that had reused elephant barns for rhino holding. We also got to see the Indianapolis Zoo renovation during the conference pre-trip. Later, our staff took trips to nearby zoos that had done the same – Nashville Zoo, Zoo Atlanta and Riverbanks Zoo – and got a visit from Jade Tuttle from North Carolina Zoo to get an onsite evaluation. Construction began in early summer 2024 and after about 8 months of work, the barn was ready for rhinos. We originally planned for just two young boys, but we learned at AZA mid-year that the SSP had two more to place. And we definitely had the space! So, in March 2025, our bachelor herd roster was finally set.



We currently hold two sets of half-brothers -- Mylo/Ranger (the Florida boys) and Gus/Liam (the Ohio boys). All four are "cousins" who share a paternal grandfather, Chuck. And even more exciting for us, Ranger and Mylo are the grandsons of Polly, one of our original herd rhinos who died in late 2022 at the age of 54. This allowed us to bring back a little bit of our history as we looked to the future.

The Florida boys arrived on April 9th, 2025, with the Ohio boys moving in on June 30th. We allowed each pair to become familiar with both yards on their own before we began introductions. We also did long distance howdies where they could see each other across the barn. Luckily, the design of our barn allowed the boys to hear each other and see each other from day one. On Aug. 3rd, we began full howdies. We started with a limited amount of howdy space, some areas separated with metal bollards and some areas that were just cables. In the following weeks, we gradually increased the amount of time they spent together and the amount of howdy space they had. By Aug. 19th, we were allowing overnight howdy access.

After weeks of howdies with nothing but neutral or positive interactions, we decided it was time to open the gates. We began full contact intros on Aug. 25th. Together, they all had access to both yards during the day but were split into their sibling pairs to separate yards and sides of the barn at night. Nearly a year later, we continue to manage them this way to allow them a break from their cousins overnight. The herd spends all day together but spend the night only with their brother. And we find that it helps maintain a good relationship among all four. They readily separate into their sibling pairs in the afternoon when it's time for dinner, most often doing it on their own while waiting on the paddock. And because of paddock and yard access, they still have the opportunity to see each other overnight if they choose.



During the time we've cared for them, we have been continuing training with the Florida boys and teaching the Ohio boys those behaviors as well. Gus and Liam are fast learners and are quickly catching up to the training repertoire. All boys are now able to be weighed weekly, and we can draw blood from all four. In addition, we offer VIP experiences four days a week, which allow guests to come into the barn to meet the boys close up.

Today, we see the boys stay in their sibling pairs at least half of the time during the day. When it's time to play, they usually spar with a cousin. And when it's time to relax, they always choose their brother. But often, all four can be found eating, napping and wallowing together. Housing four growing boys has been a beautiful challenge, and they make for an active and dynamic guest experience. And for us, seeing four boys out there together growing and sparring and running has been the experience of a lifetime. We also believe that having two sets of tightly bonded brothers that came from strong natal herds has really helped with the introductions and the way they interact with each other. We caught lightning in a bottle with these four. Hopefully, what they learn from each other here helps them develop into fantastic breeding bulls in the future.



Barn

- 4,000 square feet split into two sides
- 4 stalls on cow side with a place to hook up a crate
- 2 stalls on the bull side with a chute connecting them (that we added)
- Hallways on each side that can be animal space or keeper space. Overnight, rhinos have access to stalls and hallways, which basically doubles the amount of barn space for the animals.
- Heated and padded floors
- Doors on stalls and between stalls are hydraulic and the doors for the halls are swing gates
- Added Dutch doors in several locations to allow us to be able to see the rhinos and give us access to them in several locations.
- Modified the ERD to become an RRD – installed a smaller scale, modified one shift door to have either butt or head access, and one wall is a squeeze that can be tilted on either end. The squeeze wall also has 9 access panels as well.
- Indoor viewing with info graphics and videos. Two windows in the viewing space slide open (like a drive-through) so we can give keeper chats while standing in the barn.
- Indoor space with benches to do VIP encounters
- New camera system that gives us full view of the barn, paddock and the majority of the yards

Yard

- 30,000 square feet
- Two yards – the tree and shade yard – which can be separate or made into one big yard
- Had to fill in two 20,000-gallon pools with rocks and dirt
- All bollard and cable fencing, around both yards and between the two yards
- Two heated automatic drinkers
- Added a covered paddock next to the barn with gas heaters. Paddock can be split into two sides so they can have access to it overnight. We also added an outdoor area next to the paddock, so we have a second location for VIP experiences.
- Added covered area in yard near fence for guest demonstrations and keeper chats. Also has two radiant heaters and a concrete pad in the exhibit so we have a dry place to feed. This is also a preferred napping spot, putting the rhinos front and center for the guests.
- Included half buried tire, root ball and large log for rubbing, and hanging logs on a swivel attached to one of the two umbrellas
- Added dirt to create elevated spots
- One concrete bottom mud wallow and they've dug two more
- Have a rotating, motion detecting brush from Future Cow, called the Comfort Brush. It was a little scary at first but now all four boys use it regularly. If you can get one, get one!

*Names of keepers
Zoo Knoxville*

Want to see more of Knoxville? Check out Jacob Norris's video

[View](#)



IRKA is happy to announce:
Jacksonville Zoo and Botanical Gardens
as the host of the
2027 Rhino Keeper Workshop!

May 17th - 21st.

**Huge thanks to the whole team getting busy making preparations
for another inspiring week of
rhino conservation and care.**

Keeper Professional Development at ARPI

In May of 2026, I had the amazing opportunity to participate in IRKA's Keeper Professional Development Program(KPDP) at the hosting facility African Rhino Protection Initiative(ARPI). ARPI operates on large pastures allowing their rhinos and other hoofstock the space to exhibit natural, mixed species behavior. I got to learn their daily routine consisting of: AM feeding and ID'ing, barn cleaning and calf care, PM feeds and night spotting. Working with 13 rhinos with varying ages; as young as 3 days old and as old as 34 years provides a great opportunity to learn different stages of rhino life care. What I was most blown away by was going into the pasture with the rhinos to feed and medicate them, it was something I had never experienced and was amazing every time.



ARPI has done great work in artificial insemination and repro studies so getting to work with such an experienced staff made the trip incredibly insightful. While I was there I got to participate in rectal ultrasounding. This was an amazing experience as I had never seen it performed in person and getting to perform it under great supervision was a highlight of my time. I also had the chance to draw blood on a rhino, I have driven for procedures at my own facility but have never been the one to poke so that was a great experience.

My experience in the KPDP was invaluable for my personal growth and development in rhino care. It provided great insight to how other facilities work around their rhinos and showed me the challenges other facilities may face. I cannot recommend enough for fellow members to participate in the program, it is an amazing chance to work with new staff who are incredibly insightful and to learn new ways to care for rhinos.

May 4-6th

African Rhino Protection Initiative

Logan Hall - Fossil Rim

Want to see more about KPDP? Check out Logan's video

View

Rhino Research Review:

Behavior Analysis of Rhinoceroses and their Monitoring using a 3D Geovisualization Prototype

Black and white rhinoceroses face ongoing threats from poaching and habitat disturbance, making effective monitoring essential for their conservation. This study presents Rhinos3D, a web-based 3D visualization and monitoring platform that integrates GPS tracking data from rhinoceroses with landscape information to support wildlife management and research. More than 200 rhinos across seven reserves in South Africa and Mozambique have been fitted with GPS horn-mounted tracking devices, generating approximately one million location records since 2021.

To demonstrate the platform's capabilities, researchers analyzed one year of movement data from black and white rhinos in Hluhluwe–Imfolozi Game Reserve, South Africa. The results showed that black rhinos were generally most active during evening and nighttime hours, with males traveling greater distances than females. White rhinos exhibited reduced movement during the wet season and showed peak activity during cooler parts of the day. Seasonal and sex-related differences in movement patterns and home-range size were also identified.

The study highlights how GPS tracking combined with 3D visualization can improve understanding of rhino behavior, support anti-poaching efforts, and enhance conservation decision-making. Future development of the Rhinos3D platform aims to incorporate environmental variables such as weather and vegetation, creating a digital twin of wildlife reserves capable of detecting unusual behavior and providing real-time conservation insights. These findings demonstrate the potential of advanced monitoring technologies to improve both scientific research and the protection of endangered rhinoceros populations.

Reference

Besse, M., Thullen, B., Lotfian, M., Duthé, V., Mbongwa, S., Ehrensberger, J., & Ingensand, J. (2026). AGILE: GIScience Series, 7, 20.
<https://doi.org/10.5194/agile-giss-7-20-2026>

Correspondences:

Births:

Zoo Tampa ----- SWR females "**Kelele**" and "**Malaika**"
The Wilds ----- female SWR
African Rhino Protective Initiative ----- first female SWR "**Ahbeni**"
Beekse Bergen ----- black rhino
Dubai Safari Park ----- male SWR "**Salem**"

Deaths:

Denver Zoo ----- male black rhino "**Rhudy**"
Pittsburgh Zoo ----- male black rhino "**Jomo**"
Henry Doorly Zoo ----- female SWR "**Mashile**"
Knowsley Safari Park ----- female SWR "**Piglet**"

Transfers:

Racine Zoo received male black "**Ayubu**" from **Lee Richardson Zoo**
Denver Zoo received male GOHR "**Rupert**" from **San Diego Zoo Safari Park**
Paignton Zoo received male SWRs "**Khulu**" and "**Benja**" from **Whipsnade Zoo**
Greater Vancouver Zoo received male SWR "**Theo**"
Edinburgh Zoo received male GOHR "**Jai**" from **Fota Wildlife Park**
Wroclaw Zoo received male GOHR "**Csulok**" from **Zoo Szeged**
Zoo de Beauval received male GOHR "**Sonai**" from **Parc de Branfere**
Werribee Open Range Zoo received female SWR "**Nyah**" from **Auckland Zoo**



New Members

Larry Kelsey	-----	Oklahoma City Zoo
Sydney Leajore	-----	Ol Pejeta Conservancy
William Freeman	-----	Phoenix Zoo
Ross Taylor	-----	Werribee Open Range Zoo
Jordy van Geest	-----	Netherlands
Andrew Haertzen	-----	Audubon Zoo
Robert Jackson	-----	Ellen Trout Zoo
Grace Bally	-----	Ellen Trout Zoo
Grace Bukowski	-----	Monterey Zoo
Samantha Perez	-----	Monterey Zoo
Jodie Wheeler	-----	Zoo Tampa
Danielle Kaplan	-----	Zoo Tampa
Ashlee Sundberg	-----	Zoo Tampa
Ashley Potchunok	-----	Zoo Tampa
Katie Payne	-----	Zoo Tampa
Jessica Seflack	-----	Zoo Tampa
Sally Smolka	-----	Zoo Tampa
Averee Andrews	-----	Zoo Tampa

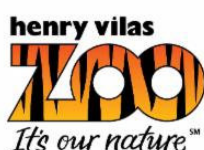
Conservation Partners

Conservation Partners are conservation organizations or zoological institutions which support rhino conservation in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These partnerships provide discounts for the supporting institution to workshops and annual membership dues. 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!

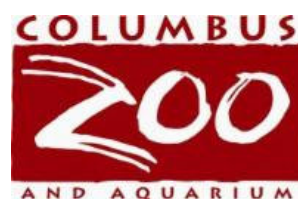
If you or your institution are interested in becoming a Conservation Partner, please visit:

[Support IRKA](#)





colossal 



Share on social



Check out my website 

Join me on the Wix mobile app to stay updated, share posts
and keep in touch.

 [Download & Join](#)

This email was created with Wix. [Discover More](#)