



ZOOS GO WILD FOR THE RHINO

WHY RHINOS?

Across Africa and Asia, rhinos confront almost insurmountable challenges to their survival. Shot outright for their horn, snared incidentally by bushmeat traps, and squeezed out by human development, wild rhinos today continue to die swiftly and with little public notice.

The conservation community is reeling from the tragic loss of rhinos, in some places numbering in the hundreds in a matter of mere months. Commercial poachers with increased mobility and access to weapons (sometimes cheaper than food) overwhelm understaffed protected areas. The rising bushmeat trade and the desperation of expanding human communities for food is emptying wildlife habitat.

Solutions are needed to balance meeting basic human needs with safeguarding wildlife – solutions that invest in local communities as the most sustainable source of protection for wildlife. Rhinos are a flagship species – protecting them encourages ecotourism and other funding that serves to protect the other lesser-known species living with the rhino.

In some areas, rhino protection units patrol on foot, disarming and removing traps and apprehending poachers. Pilots of surveillance planes, veterinary units in helicopters, and ground crews of trackers risk their lives to monitor from the air and perform the triage care and translocations that save rhinos from certain death.

AZA member zoos have long joined forces with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) and other NGOs and government agencies to infuse strategic support, and these efforts are about to double.

ZOOS TAKE ACTION

Each year, the European Association of Zoos & Aquaria (EAZA) selects target taxon for association-wide support of *in-situ* conservation. The choice for the 2005-6 campaign was the rhino. Launched last September, already 125 zoos are participating in fund and awareness raising activities across Europe.

While AZA does not have such a program, the AZA Rhino Advisory Group/Species Survival Plans (RAG/SSP) and IRF partnered to develop a North American campaign complementing the EAZA Save the Rhinos Campaign, supported by U.K.-based Save the Rhino International.

Ideas for the campaign, to be managed by IRF, were discussed and endorsed at the RAG/SSP meeting at the 2005 AZA Annual Conference. A January 2006 launch was approved by the IRF board in October. Spurred by a major multi-year commitment by New York-based clothing company Ecko Unltd., the goal is to raise \$850,000 in new funds to supplement \$1,150,000 already pledged by North American sources of support for rhino conservation and increase public awareness among zoo visitors and new constituencies.



“The rhino – it’s not extinct. Our message is that it could have been but it’s not and here’s why. We are making a difference.”

BY JULIE ANTON DUNN



THE NORTH AMERICAN SAVE THE RHINOS CAMPAIGN IS FOCUSED ON THREE CRITICALLY THREATENED SPECIES OF RHINO – the Black Rhino, Greater One-Horned Asian or Indian Rhino, and Sumatran Rhino – with the goal of reinforcing protection measures and expanding rhino populations and ranges by:

- **In-situ** – Doubling the number of critically-endangered rhino populations in select protected habitats in the wild within ten years. This goal is based on the *Rule of 72*, by which a population of rhinos can increase two-fold within a decade at a natural reproductive rate of seven percent, if adequately protected.
- **Ex-situ** – Genetically and demographically enhancing captive rhino populations through exchanges of animals and the development of technical capacity and programmatic cooperation.

The Campaign is well underway, and of the 90 plus zoos with rhinos in North America, 42 have contributed or pledged to donate in 2006. AAZK through Bowling for Rhinos has committed over \$57,000. There are at least 19 zoos making pledges that have not contributed to *in-situ* rhino conservation before. Furthermore, five or more zoos have made multi-year pledges. However, we hope for 100 percent participation.

All rhino holding and other interested zoos received “toolkits” containing publicity and educational materials, including a brochure and poster for customizing with the zoo logo, plus ideas for grassroots fundraising. “Zoos have a lot to gain by contributing to this campaign” says IRF president John Lukas, “like access to new partnerships and a compelling cause for rallying zoo patrons to support efforts to conserve rhinos in the wild as well as in their zoo.”

Foundations and other corporations are also joining the Campaign. All U.S. companies using the rhino name or image have been targeted for contributions as a means of giving back to the wild.

Many zoos are organizing activities to educate visitors and raise funds to be donated to the Campaign in the name of the zoo. Two examples from Ohio are:

Cincinnati Zoo is planning a Rockin for Rhinos benefit concert with local restaurant/bar Rhino Billiards, and rhino activities for its ACT WILD weekend at the zoo. Kids will color or draw a rhino and finish the sentence. “We need to save rhinos because...” The Zoo will then select 10-20 of the best and copy and send them to politicians with a letter urging them to support the Multinational Species Conservation Fund that channeled about \$715,000 into

rhino conservation in 2005 through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Columbus Zoo may sell “rhino banks” or distribute them to children who will then use them to collect Campaign donations.

Watch for what zoos are doing in upcoming *Communiqué* issues.

THE RHINO – IT’S NOT EXTINCT. OUR MESSAGE IS THAT IT COULD HAVE BEEN BUT IT’S NOT AND HERE’S WHY. WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

JULIE ANTON DUNN IS THE MANAGER OF THE INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION’S NORTH AMERICAN SAVE THE RHINOS CAMPAIGN

RHINOS HIT THE STREETS OF NEW YORK

*ecko untd.’s line of clothing and accessories is associated with urban hip hop culture and bears a rhino logo that is proving to be a status symbol among youth.

“While the rhino has been an integral part of *ecko untd.’s heritage since its beginning 12 years ago, it wasn’t until we really studied this majestic animal and its daily struggles that a true affinity was born,” says Marc Ecko, *ecko’s CEO. “We always said that the rhino is a survivor, so when we overcame our early financial struggles it was only natural that we dedicate ourselves to giving back to the animal that provided the inspiration.”

Marc Ecko decided to “give back” from the huge success of the “rhino brand” with a \$450,000 pledge that launched the North American Save the Rhinos Campaign.

Early in discussions about a campaign, Jon Gerszberg, brother of Ecko co-founder Seth Gerszberg, was keen on raising public awareness of the rhino’s plight. Stepping out onto the streets of New York after a campaign meeting, he stopped passer bys to ask, “Where’s the rhino?” One response: “It’s extinct.” Another response: “It’s a dinosaur.” The question arose, how can we reach people? Ecko’s answer was to put a rhino in Central Park.

In June 2005, Ecko hosted its first sell-out “Save the Rhinos” concert in Central Park’s Rumsey Playfield, featuring hip-hop stars The Roots and De La Soul. The second Save the Rhinos benefit concert on June 8, 2006, presented Common and Rakim. “Save the Rhinos t-shirts from the concerts are seen all over Manhattan,” says Miryam Reinitz, Ecko’s senior marketing manager.