Overview of IRF/ AZA Rhino TAG Conservation & Research

Evan S. Blumer, V.M.D. and Thomas J. Foose, Ph. D.
International Rhino Foundation (IRF), 20 Pen Mar Street, Waynesboro, PA 17268, USA

There will be a brief overview of the status of rhino taxa (species & subspecies) in the wild and captivity. It will be emphasized that IRF & the AZA Rhino TAG believe both in situ protection and ex situ propagation are integral components of rhino conservation. The IRF & TAG have been cooperating for almost 10 years on contributions to both components and linkages between them. IRF supports and manages major in situ programs; the TAG coordinates the captive management and propagation programs in North America. The TAG has developed and periodically revised a Rhino Conservation Research Masterplan. Using this Masterplan, IRF has developed research priorities and supported research projects, largely selected through two competitive, peer-reviewed RFP (Request for Proposal) processes. In the last, RFP process, another organization SOS-Rhino also participated. Over $ 1 million has been provided for rhino research. The emphasis in the research priorities and projects has been toward solving problems necessary to achieving viability of captive populations and programs as a component of rhino conservation strategies. The central problems, research priorities, and major projects will be briefly identified. Finally, it will be observed that many of the other presentations at the Symposium are reports from these research projects.

Practical Applications of Operant Conditioning for Health, Research and Behavior in the Black Rhinoceros

Christine M. Bobko, Denver Zoological Gardens (rhinoqueen@yahoo.com)

The use of operant conditioning for effective management of animals has been implemented with various species in the zoological setting. The principle behind this training technique is the use of positive reinforcement, which gives the animal a choice in participating in the behavior through a protected contact system. The Denver zoo training program was initiated due to an illness in a black rhino that required serial immobilizations for blood sampling. We initiated operant conditioning for the collection of biomaterials from our black rhinos as a comparatively non-stressful alternative to chemical immobilization. The training program targeted medical concerns which included blood and urine collection, rectal temperatures and footwork. Currently, a research project is underway to determine the correlation of environmental stressors and blood cortisol levels that will allow for improved management of this species in captivity. The application of operant conditioning has proved to be an invaluable tool for medical management, research and behavioral enrichment for our black rhinos.

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Scientific Progress Reports

Harald M. Schwammer
Thomas J. Foose
Michael Fouraker
Deborah Olson

A Research Update on Elephants and Rhinos

Proceedings of the International Elephant and Rhino Research Symposium, Vienna, June 7-11, 2001