

## IRKA Keeper Professional Development Program:

Vickie A. Steele, Section Leader –Rhinos : Visits Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens

White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee, FL had the unique opportunity to receive a young male Sumatran Rhino named “Harapan” from the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens. What was I to do??? I have worked with Southern and Northern White, Southern and Eastern Black and Greater One Horned rhinos, but have no experience with the hairy ones. The thought of taking care of one in the sunny state of Florida scared the heck out of me!

I had the chance to spend some time with the Cincinnati Zoo Sumatran rhino keepers prior to transporting “Harapan” to Yulee. Through the IRKA Keeper Professional Development Program, who sponsored the trip, I flew to Cincinnati on 6 Nov. 2008. After arrival to the airport with a pick up by Wendy Shaffstall, we headed to the zoo to familiarize me with the area. I met up with Paul Reinhart the Supervisor of the Sumatran Rhino area. I got to meet “Harapan”, his dam Emi, sire “Ipuh” and his sister “Suci”. “Harapan” was the third Sumatran rhino born at Cincinnati Zoo and space was getting tight in their barn. Emi was going to be given the opportunity to be re-bred by “Ipuh” in the spring.



The next 4 days were spent with Paul, Libby and Lissa, the other primary keepers for the Sumatran rhinos in the Wildlife Canyon area of the zoo. That first day, I met Jenny the technician who came to check on “Harapan”, his TB test site and to collect blood. Unfortunately she was unsuccessful at collecting the blood sample. Her technique using a tourniquet on the ear was a first for me. I had never seen that method used. Locating a vein on a hairy leg with very rough skin was nearly impossible, so the ear vein was the primary choice.

The first couple of days, it was difficult to get the staff to allow me to actually do physical labor. They wanted me to watch and bond with “Harapan” rather than clean the stalls with them. As I followed the staff around I was asking questions constantly. I was going to be the “expert at White Oak” and needed to learn all I possibly could in 5 days! Of course, I could always call the Staff at Cincinnati anytime I had a question too.



**Sumatran rhino**  
*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*

The main issues with keeping Sumatran Rhinos in captivity are diet and exposure to sun. Their diet is 80% ficus browse! Ficus in Cincinnati?, I don't think so! They actually have it shipped from the San Diego Zoo. The main types of ficus fed in Cincinnati are *Ficus benjamina*, *Ficus ribiginosa* and *Ficus macropylla*. The Sumatran rhino's remainder diet consists of 3 lbs of Wild Herbivore grain, produce (apples, bananas, carrots and yams) plus hay. The hay fed at Cincinnati is Orchard Grass. "Harapan" would get about ½ flake in the a.m. and a whole flake in the afternoon. The ficus amount would average out at about 40-50 lbs per day for a young Sumatran Rhino. Of course, that amount would increase as he matures. "Harapan" weighed almost 1100 lbs at that time. Local browse was fed when it was available. They also get a vitamin E supplement daily.



The other issue, sunlight is a major problem. Cincinnati Zoo has constructed some amazing shade cloth structures for their exhibits. The entire yard is covered in nicely designed cloth. Too much exposure to direct sunlight can cause blindness in the Sumatran Rhinos. "Harapan's" sire, "Ipuh" has damaged eyes. Coming to the "Sunshine state" could be a problem. We are to watch for excess tearing or discharge, the outer eye being red (white is normal), whole eye going grey in color and constant rubbing of eyes.

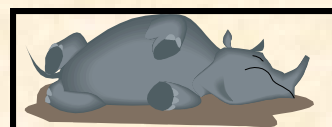
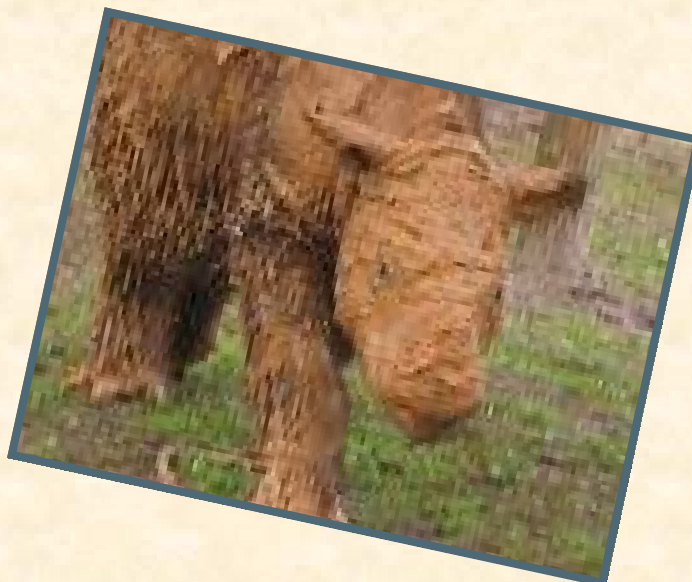
"Harapan's" pre-ship exam included being TB tested behind one of his ears. He was also vaccinated with Lepto (lepto-ferm 5, Pfizer) and an EEE, WEE, tetanus combo. Fecal samples are collected once a month not only for the usual parasite check, but also to monitor testosterone to track as males mature.



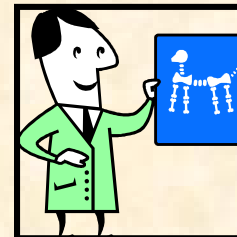
While I was there, it was too cold to spend much time out in yard. Each rhino was given the opportunity to get out for a short time, most days. As long as it is over 40 degrees they could have some access outside. The rhinos prefer to have access to yard and barn, so they are not usually locked on exhibit. Sumatran rhinos of course love their mud wallows. They also like to have access to a pool, but this tends to be used as a place to defecate. They will not go into their mud wallow if there is feces in the mud or close to the wallow.

The Sumatran Rhinos are hosed down daily to check for any skin problems or abrasions. Cincinnati Zoo's Sumatran rhino barn had hot water available for this. The rhinos got used the daily routine, but I couldn't tell if they really enjoyed it. Emi likes to have the hose nozzle placed in her mouth to massage her tongue. The rhinos are also weighed daily. They are all shifted through a chute with a scale built in. They are given produce treats for standing still on the scale unit. All the rhinos did this very well.

"Harapan" and "Suci" were conditioned to lie down when rubbed. "Suci" does it very quickly, when rubbed just in the right spot. "Harapan" takes a few more minutes. Their skin is very rough, so it is always best to have gloves on your hands before doing this. Both of these rhinos are friendly enough to work with directly. Paul could go into the barn stalls with these 2 rhinos and work with them. I was allowed to watch and take pictures while being in the stall with them. Once "Harapan" was weaned (Sept. 08) he lived alone, as did the other Sumatran Rhinos. "Harapan" is a talker, and spent lots of time making all sorts of vocalizations. I was told he has the largest range of vocalizations they have ever heard. There are barred windows between the stalls so the rhinos could, at times, see the rhino next door.



Sumatran rhinos also like toys. A spool and a boomer ball were “Harapan’s” favorite. He likes to set the spool upright and stand on it. He would stand up on anything he could. “Harapan” was doing great with his crate conditioning. The Sumatran rhino keepers did a great job of working with “Harapan”. He ate all his meals in the crate which was quite large and often slept in the crate even though he had access to his stalls.

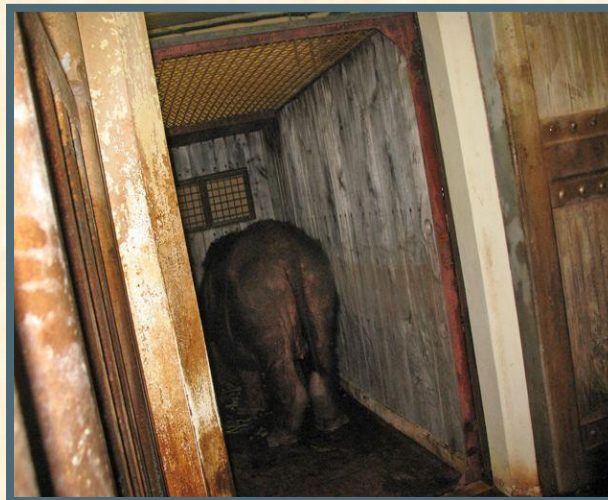


Over the course of my time at the zoo, I met a lot of zoo employees. Many just came down to say good-bye to “Harapan”. The Executive Director, Thane Maynard even made the trip down to meet me and say his good byes. My visit also allowed me to visit other parts of the zoo, including the Greater One Horned Rhinos. Each of the females used in the AI project are related to the 2 rhinos I care for at White Oak. “Chitwan” is daughter of “Mechi” and “Nikki” is the daughter of Patrick. Dr. Mark Campbell came on Sunday to check “Harapan’s” TB site, one more time. He passed with flying colors. On Monday, while Paul and I were picking up the truck, Technician Jenny Kroll came back for one last try at collecting some blood from “Harapan”. She was successful this time. She said it was because I wasn’t there to jinx her.

Tues., 11 Nov. 08 was moving day. At 6:30 a.m. folks started to arrive at the barn. At 7 a.m. Paul, Lissa and I fed “Harapan” in the crate, he walked in, and the rails and back door were put in place. “Harapan” vocalized a bit, but was very calm, munching away at his diet. The maintenance crew consisting of Don, Tim and Wayne were very helpful. Randy, the supervisor of the Veldt area was also present to assist. (yes, Randy Pairan.) Wildlife Canyon keeper Mark was also present to assist. First challenge was getting the large crate out of the barn. There was minimal clearance from top/bottom, maybe 1/16 of an inch. They got it in the barn, so I knew they could get it out. After shifting and pushing, the ever so dedicated staff got the crate in the truck. The crate was secured, and food items (for the road and for acclimation over to WO browse and hay) were placed in the truck. Paul and I were on our way. The road trip was very uneventful. We stopped to check on “Harapan” regularly, to give him additional food items and to offer water. It took us 13 ½ hours to complete the road trip.



Our arrival to White Oak Conservation Center happened at about 10 p.m. on 11 Nov. The staff was anxious for our arrival. With the area lit up with portable lights, we situated ourselves in the future yard for “Harapan”. His crate was removed by forklift by the WO maintenance and wildlife staff and placed at the end of a chute. The chute led to a small, shade cloth covered yard, and then to the barn. “Harapan” was hesitant to come out of the crate at first, but once he was out, he turned around and followed Paul’s voice and the trail of produce. “Harapan” was in the barn in no time. He stayed very calm. The light was kept on in the barn overnight for acclimation. Early the next morning Paul and I, checked in on “Harapan”, who appeared to have done very well overnight. Later we offered him food items, both from Cincy and from WOCC. He was given access to his small, cloth covered yard that morning. “Harapan” explored the yard and ate his a.m. diet very well. His hay was going to change from Orchard grass to a combination of alfalfa and coastal Bermuda grass hay. Thanks to Barbara Lintzenich the Cincinnati Zoo nutritionist for figuring it out for us. The ficus browse species would change to *Ficus nitida*, *Ficus alii* and *Ficus benjamina* and would be shipped from south Florida rather than all the way from San Diego. Later in the a.m. “Harapan” found his mud wallow and within a couple minutes, his entire body was covered in red clay mud! He appeared to really enjoy it and the warmer temperatures. Paul was able to stay around at WOCC for a couple days to help acclimate “Harapan” to his new home. Paul helped feed all the animals on the rhino area one day and he helped clean the rhino area the next day! (that’s 17 rhinos, a tapir, 6 Somali Wild Asses; banteng, Grevy’s Zebra, and a mixed species pen that includes bongo, addra and Nile Lechwe.)



On Friday morning, Paul said one last good-bye to “Harapan” and was on his way, in the big truck, back to Cincinnati. The trip gave Paul the opportunity to see White Oak Conservation Center and Plantation and I hope he is comfortable with “Harapan’s” new home and the caring WO staff. We will do all that we can to help protect this extremely endangered species.

On cloudy days, “Harapan” has access to another yard which he has explored a few times. This yard does not have any shade cloth, but does have a couple shelters and a couple large oak trees and a sweet gum tree. Eventually, at night, he will have access to a one acre yard that has a large mud wallow, numerous trees and a shelter. There will be a pool added before that time.

“Harapan’s” keeper staff is very excited to have him at White Oak. He has adjusted to us and allows us to rub him down for foot pad checks. He has been the “ham” of the plantation as numerous employees, plus the entire IRF board, has come to visit him. If you ask me, he is the cutest thing at White Oak including those little cheetah cubs born the week-end before “Harapan” arrived, but I’m a bit biased, as I know most of you are too.

With “Harapan’s” presence, White Oak Conservation Center is the only place in the world with all four captive rhino species. What an incredible opportunity we have here in northeast Florida.

**Welcome!**

## 2009 Workshop Updates

The 2009 Rhino Keeper Workshop is only five months away! The following is a tentative schedule of events for May 17-21st. A website for the workshop is currently under construction, but will be available for hotel information and registration on December 20th. You can access this great resource at the address [www.rkw09.com](http://www.rkw09.com).



### Tentative Schedule for Workshop



#### May 17 2009

12:00-9:00 Registration  
 9:00-? Board Meeting  
 6:00-9:00 Icebreaker

#### May 19 2009

6:30 7:30 Breakfast  
 8:00-12:00 Lowry Park Agenda  
 12:00 4:30 Lowry Park Fee Time

6:00 Dinner

#### May 18 2009

6:00-8:00 Breakfast  
 8:00-12:00 Talks  
 12:00-1:00 Lunch  
 1:00-5:00 Talks  
 6:00 Dinner

#### May 20 2009

6:00-7:30 Breakfast  
 8:00-5:00 Busch Garden Day ( highlighted by immobilization seminar)  
 6:00 Optional dinner at a local restaurant

#### May 21 2009

6:00-7:30 Breakfast  
 8:00-12:00 Talks  
 12:00-1:00 Lunch  
 1:00-5:00 Talks  
 5:00-6:00 Cocktails and Closing Board Meeting  
 6:00-? Closing Dinner, and Silent Auction

