WHITE OAK CONSERVATION CENTER NEWSLETTER FALL/WINTER 2007

KARATASI

NEW SPECIES AT WHITE OAK: THE DETERMINING FACTORS

Juvenile Andean condors are brown in color for the first three to four years of their life. This color works well as camouflage against the background of the mountains to which they are native. Andean condors are one of two new species to White Oak Conservation Center.

What determines which species will be housed at White Oak Conservation Center ? Why do we have the species that we have and how does the staff decide if a new species will come to White Oak? Every year the White Oak Conservation Center staff reviews the animal collection in a process called Collection Planning. This process reviews changes not only within the White Oak collection but also any changes on the status of each species in the wild and with our zoo partners. The goal for the White Oak Collection Plan is to ensure that the managed animal programs contribute to the long-term survival of related populations in the wild.

During the Collection Planning process, each species currently at White Oak, and any new species being considered for the collection, are reviewed. Several guidelines or criteria have been developed to help the staff determine if specific species should be maintained at White Oak. Some of these guidelines include conservation priorities and resources available at White Oak. Conservation of the species is reviewed using the latest conservation data on the wild populations and status in captivity. Each species is linked to either one of Gilman International Conservation projects, one of our partners, or to any ongoing conservation research project. This link with field projects is fundamental to our mission to conserve wildlife. Resources needed to house the species are considered to determine if there is existing infrastructure and whether staff expertise is available.

The environmental constraints of northeast Florida are also a consideration within the resources that can be provided. The climate is considered "subtropical" with mild winters. High temperatures average between 64 and 91° Farenheit throughout the year with lows seldom dipping below 40° during the winter. Average rainfall is 52 inches. Most animals housed at White Oak can tolerate the area's humid heat and mild winters which means that most of them do not have to be housed in barns during cold weather.

The guidelines at White Oak have been developed into a Species Selection Criteria Matrix. Number values have been assigned to each criteria allowing individual species to be ranked and compared with other species housed at White Oak. With a number value assigned, all new proposed programs can be evaluated to determine whether or not to include the program in the future. Two recently proposed species, the Somali wild ass *(Equus asinus somalicus)* and the Andean Condor *(Vultur gryphus)* ranked very high in the process due to the threat to the species in the wild and the ongoing conservation work that is associated with each of these species. Because of their rankings, White Oak has taken the steps to procure these species and conservation programs have been initiated at White Oak for the Somali wild ass and the Andean Condor.

Existing animal programs at White Oak are also ranked. A few of the species at White Oak do not have a high conservation ranking but some, such as giraffes, are kept for their educational value. After all, what would a trip to White Oak be if guests could not compare the well-known giraffe to the more elusive "forest giraffe", the okapi?

Four female Somali wild asses from San Diego Wild Animal Park arrived at White Oak Conservation Center in September.

Rhinos on the Move

Southern white rhinoceros first arrived at White Oak in 1984 and the first calf was born in 1991. Later, in 1998, one male and five female white rhinos were imported from South Africa. This group of rhinos has been very successful with 13 calves being born over the years.

In 2006, the North Carolina Zoo contacted White Oak about the possibility of acquiring rhinos from the Conservation Center. At the time, White Oak was housing 16 rhinos and some needed to be moved to other facilities. In the spring of 2007 a total of nine rhinos were moved from White Oak; six rhinos (two male calves, three adult females and one female calf) were moved to North Carolina Zoo; two males were moved to Granby Zoo in Quebec Canada and one female was sent to Disney's Animal Kingdom. Moving one or two rhinos at a time is almost routine for the staff at White Oak as rhinos have been moved in and out of the Conservation Center for more than 20 years. But moving six rhinos at one time, females with their two year old calves, was a challenge; a challenge that the staff met and completed with flying colors.

Two-year-old calves no longer depend on their mothers and in captivity are usually separated from them at this age. But since the move to North Carolina was scheduled to occur many months in advance, the staff left the calves with their mothers in order to make the move easier and introduction to a new home less stressful.

On the day of the move, White Oak veterinary staff sedated the rhinos and the animal staff maneuvered them into their crates. The procedure was well planned with each staff member being assigned to specific duties. The rhinos were crated two at a time so females and their calves did not have to be separated until they were secured inside their crate. The six rhinos in their crates were then loaded onto two semi-trucks and driven to the North Carolina Zoo in Asheboro, NC. The rhinos were unloaded that evening and females and calves were reunited. The group settled into their new home better than could have been expected and were soon let into their new 30-acre yard. The male from the North Carolina Zoo was introduced to the female group and breeding has already occurred.

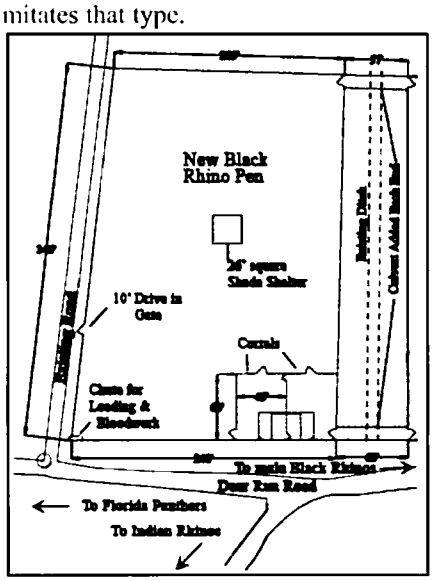
With the move of the nine rhinos this year, White Oak is able to concentrate on breeding our F_1 females. Offspring born to animals from the wild are considered first generation captive born, or F_1's. White rhinos from the wild have reproduced very well in captivity but there have been problems with the F_1 females not reproducing in several institutions. At White Oak, with its large enclosure and natural setting, we are undertaking the challenge of working with individuals that have not reproduced. A new breeding male will arrive at White Oak in November 2007 and, if all goes well, new calves should be expected by 2009.

Moving rhinos, whether its from one area to another within the Conservation Center, or all the way to Canada, takes advance planning and coordination between all animal staff involved. Above right, rhino keepers Jennifer Braun and Tim President feed alfalfa hay to a rhino in order to get her close to the fence for the veterinarian. Once the rhinos are mildly sedated, they are guided into individual crates (second from top) which are then loaded onto a trailer by forklift. Once all the rhinos are loaded, they begin their trip to their new home. Animal staff travels with the rhinos and they are checked at all stops. All rhinos shipped from White Oak arrived safely at their destinations.

Rhino Facilities Expanded

A new enclosure is being built at White Oak Conservation Center to house our breeding population of black rhinos *(Diceros bicornis)*. Located in a heavily wooded area, this 2-acre facility is a welcome addition to the rhino area. In addition to the large yard, there are corrals where individuals can be fed and separated if necessary. A chute built into one corner will assist the keepers in conditioning the rhinos to stand for routine blood work, minor medical procedures and loading.

Black rhinos in the wild live in heavy scrub and brush *(left)* and the new yard imitates that type.



The new enclosure will be utilized as part of White Oak's black rhino breeding program. White Oak has had five black rhino calves born at the Conservation Center since 1996. The first calf, Tim, was translocated to a park in South Africa as a two-year-old in 1998. He has subsequently bred with females translocated there from European zoos and has sired three calves since his arrival.

What is a Caruncle?

*Because **Karatasi** is a newsletter about the animals and programs at White Oak Conservation Center, occasionally there are terms used in the articles that may be unfamiliar to some. Listed below are a few of the terms you may encounter when reading **Karatasi**.*

- **altricial** – being hatched or born or having young that are hatched or born in a very immature and helpless condition so as to require care for some time. Eagle chicks are altricial. They are taken care of by both their parents for up to nine weeks when they begin to leave the nest.
- **arboreal** – living in trees; adapted for life in trees.
- **browser** – an animal whose diet consists of principally on leaves, shoots and buds of trees and shrubs.
- **CITES** – Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species. CITES is principally a trade treaty among participating countries.
- **caruncle** - a naked fleshy outgrowth (as a bird's wattle). Male Andean condors have a caruncle on their cere.
- **cere** – a fleshy or waxlike swelling at the base of the upper part of the beak in cockatoos, eagles and curassows, among others.
- **dam** - the female parent of an animal.
- **diurnal** – most active during the daytime rather than at night (nocturnal), as with certain insects and animals.
- **equid** – member of the horse family Equidae. Zebras and wild asses are equids.
- ***ex situ*** – outside the natural or original position or place; i.e. *ex situ* conservation programs occur outside the natural range of the species.
- **flagship species** - a species of animal (usually large and charismatic) that represents an area of conservation which may include many other endangered species. Okapi are a flagship species for the Okapi Wildlife Reserve.
- **grazer** – to feed, principally, on growing grasses and herbage; in fields, pastures or naturally occurring grasslands.
- **immobilization** - to reduce or eliminate motion of (the body or a part) by mechanical or chemical (drugs) means. Many animals at White Oak are immobilized in order for the veterinary staff to do physicals or medical procedures.
- **indigenous** – living or occurring naturally in a specific area or environment; native.
- ***in situ*** – in the natural or original position or place; i.e. *in situ* conservation takes place inside the natural range of the species.
- **IUCN** – The World Conservation Union. IUCN ranks taxa of animals and plants according to their status in the wild.
- **nocturnal** – principally active at night. The opposite of diurnal.
- **precocial** - capable of a high degree of independent activity from birth. Ducklings are precocial. Opposite of altricial.
- **SSP** – Species Survival Plan: The AZA's (American Association for Zoos and Aquariums) SSP program helps to ensure the survival of selected wildlife species.
- **sexual dimorphism** – the existence of marked differences in shape, size, color etc,. between the adult male and female of a species. As seen in the dark brown color of the male Nile lechwe compared to the tan color of the female; or, the small cere of the female wattled curassow compared to the much larger, bulbous cere of the male.
- **sire** - the male parent of an animal.
- **terrestrial** – growing or living on land.