

BARTASH

2001



Inge



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**T**his is a story of survival and hope, a tale of power and seduction, an epic that moves from the wild Cape of South Africa to "Sex in the City." No, this isn't the plot of an upcoming soap opera; it's the true tale of our Zoo's black rhinoceros!

"It was a real team effort to get this done—a huge effort," says Curator of Mammals Alan Sironen, referring to the transport, training and eventual mating of a 2000-lb. endangered animal.

The tale begins in South Africa's Addo Elephant Park. Inge (pronounced ING-ah), a young female black rhino of the rare eastern sub-species, is under almost constant human observation. "Every black rhino living in the world is under some sort of management," Sironen clarifies. "Inge was in a semi-wild setting in her natural habitat."

Because of illegal poaching for their horns, the black rhino population had dropped from nearly 65,000 in 1970 to 2,300 in 1992. Their number has risen slightly, to about 2,700 (January 2001), due to conservation efforts. Of the eastern sub-species, there are approximately 500 left in the wild and 175 in zoos and parks around the world.

"The need for a healthy captive population is evident. At one point," Sironen explains, "18 out of 25 (captive) births were male. There was a desperate need for new genetics in the population—and for more female rhinos."

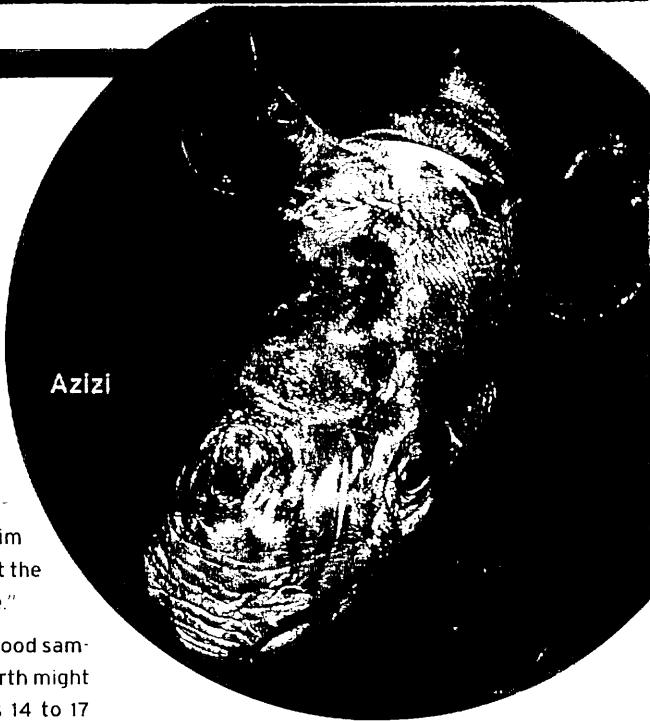
For this reason, Inge and another female, Luyisa, were brought to the United States in 1997. Luyisa went to the Kansas City Zoo; Inge—thanks to funding from the Cleveland Zoological Society—arrived at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and was slowly introduced to the Zoo's male rhino, Spike. Rhino keeper Alisa Sandor says that Inge's arrival caused huge behavioral changes in the male. "I really don't think he knew he was a rhino until Inge came," Sandor jokes.

With the ultimate plan of mating the two rhinos, it was necessary to train Inge to allow keepers to take weekly blood samples so that her hormone levels could be monitored. Sandor uses a "target" to train and communicate with the rhinos. She shows off a long broom handle with what looks like a pillow attached to the end: "I

—SARAH BARTASH, MARKETING ASSISTANT

call it my magic wand." At first, she would put the target right in front of Inge's snout and give a reward when she bumped it with her nose. When the keeper moves the target, Inge will not lumber up to the gate, place her foot in reach of the keeper, and wait for her reward while blood is drawn. Sandor clarifies, "This is a form of protected contact, and it is used for the safety of the keeper."

"We have never done such an intensive hormonal and behavioral study of any animal at the Zoo," Sironen confides. "Still, it was Spike who told us when they were really ready."



Azizi

When the rhinos had their first "date," Inge took control of the situation. Sandor smiles at the memory: "She was definitely the dominant one, teasing Spike and at one point pushing him into their outdoor pool." And he did get the job done: "We are very proud of Spike."

Animal care staff continued to take blood samples, this time to monitor when the birth might occur. "The gestation of a rhino is 14 to 17 months, so we had a large window of opportunity for the birth," says Sandor.

Finally, after all the planning and hoping, the study and care, at 5:57 p.m. on August 31, 2000, Inge delivered a bouncing baby girl! Coincidentally, Luyisa had given birth to a female calf in Kansas on August 26. The two healthy babies were a triumph for the black rhino species, and for all involved.

Local schools raised money for rhinoceros conservation and competed for the right to name the baby. The "Name the Baby Rhino" contest winner, St. Anthony School in Parma, Ohio, chose the name Azizi—which means "precious."

"Azizi is like any other baby," Sandor assures. "She chews on stuff and plays with her ball." Even though Spike (just like his counterparts in the wild) plays no part in raising the baby, Azizi plays with her dad under the rungs of their enclosures.

Like her parents, Azizi is being target-trained. She is also being separated from her mother for small increments of time. These increments will be lengthened as the months go on, until she can be separated from Inge for 8 hours. What happens then? "We are hoping," Sandor says with a grin, "to breed Spike and Inge again, and we can't have the baby getting in the way. We hope to have another bun in the oven this year."

And thus the saga continues!

## NEWSFLASH!

As this issue of Z goes to press, Azizi tips the scales at 800 lbs. and is doing fine. For more info about rhinos and romance, visit [www.clevelandzoo.com](http://www.clevelandzoo.com).

Spike