



TAG, the rhino's it!

So, just why do you love rhinos so much? And what does the Rhino TAG Chair actually do? I think these are the two most common questions I have been asked in recent times. The first one is 'simple' to answer: rhinos are fantastic creatures; I could fill pages with reasons for their uniqueness. The second answer is a bit more complicated...

Dr Friederike von Houwald | EAZA Rhino TAG Chair

The European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA) has established, for all the animal groups that are kept in EAZA member institutions, so-called Taxon Advisory Groups (TAGs). Each TAG focuses on a specific group of animals and has 'general' but also very 'specific' tasks. The main 'general' task for each TAG is the development of a Regional Collection Plan (RCP) to decide which species of animals EAZA member institutions wish to keep in the future, the reasons for this decision and the management for their captive population. For rhinos, this is rather straightforward. EAZA member institutions keep white rhinos (southern subspecies), black rhinos (eastern and south-central subspecies) and Indian rhinos. White rhinos are the most common and Indian rhinos are the rarest rhino species kept in European zoos. The EAZA Rhino

TAG states in its RCP that there is currently no reason for an EAZA member zoo to keep either Sumatran or Javan rhinos.

A more specific task, which falls under the responsibilities of the Rhino TAG Chair, is to collect and exchange information on how to keep and manage rhinos

in captivity. This information, which is collected from several zoos, specialists in rhino husbandry, nutrition, health, research, etc., is written down in husbandry and management guidelines.

The TAG also has an important role to play in the conservation of species

As more and more taxa face serious problems in the wild, it is the duty of zoos to become actively involved in raising awareness for the need of conservation by using 'their' animals as ambassadors for their wild congeners and by collecting money for *in situ* projects. For rhinos, the rise in poaching activities in Africa and Asia has served to emphasize the need for these activities and, as the Rhino TAG Chair, I consider achieving them a priority.

The EAZA Rhino Campaign in 2005/06 provided a fantastic opportunity for the Rhino TAG to become actively involved in rhino conservation. Assisted by Save the Rhino, the Rhino Campaign team set high targets and aimed to collect €350,000 whilst also spreading the word for the necessity of rhino conservation to as many European zoos as possible. Thanks to SRI and some highly engaged zoo staff, the target was almost doubled. More than €650,000 was collected, 128 member institutions of EAZA participated, and 19 rhino conservation projects could be supported.

Since this time, SRI has been a valuable partner, supporting the Rhino TAG by helping to define which rhino projects need support. Armed with this information, I am spreading the word to EAZA zoos and seeking support for those projects.

As the Rhino TAG Chair, I must coordinate all of the above mentioned tasks whilst also ensuring that progress is being made towards achieving the vision and mission of the Rhino TAG. Our vision is to see a healthy, viable population of free-



Marwell Wildlife (with the help of a few rhino suits) raised over £12,000 for rhino conservation during the EAZA Rhino Campaign



EAZA represents and links more than 300 member institutions in 35 countries



ranging rhino in intact ecosystems, cherished by the global community and our mission is to ensure that all captive populations are healthy, self-sustaining and genetically viable, and capable of being an effective tool in support of *in situ* rhino conservation. Thanks to SRI, we are moving in the right direction, and I look forward to continuing this partnership in the years to come for the benefit of rhino conservation. I will learn more about field programmes at the 2011 African Rhino Specialist Group meeting in March, at Mokala National Park in South Africa. This is the first time that the EAZA Rhino TAG Chair has been invited to participate in this meeting, and I think it is recognition of the importance of linking *in situ* and *ex situ* work to help save the rhino.

