

Keepers Saving Rhinos

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Introduction

Once, zoos existed solely for entertaining people. Most of us have fond childhood memories of the entertainment side of the zoo. But we all know that the zoo and the role of keepers have come a long way over the years.

Today, zoos are not just great places to spend the day; they are also doing a great deal to help wildlife. Millions of people visit AZA zoos every year and have fun learning about wildlife and conservation. But a lot do not realize that today zoos perform an environmental and scientific role as well as participate in conservation projects all over the world.

The changing role of today's zoo also signifies the changing role of the keeper.

Zookeeper Evolution

Zookeepers have long been known to be the professional caregivers who provide hands-on care to the diverse collection of animals living in zoos. However, today this role is ever expanding to include public education, animal research and wildlife conservation.

Keepers perform an important role in public education. Often part of their job profile is to now answer visitor's questions about an animal's diet, habits and behavior.

Research projects yield important information about animals, particularly about the methods of preserving and protecting rare and endangered species in captivity and in the wild. Keepers are most often responsible for collecting the specimens and raw data that is provided to researchers and scientist to analyze the information.

Many keepers work closely with zoo management to create and develop conservation opportunities as well as participate in outreach programs around the world. These programs benefit wildlife and keepers alike through the creation of a connection between the captive and wild animal populations.

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Keepers and Conservation

Wildlife Conservation Projects today are expanding to reach new heights because of the efforts made by zookeepers. Without their assistance many of the forces today which help to save endangered species, would simply not exist.

It is a fact; zookeepers are on the front lines when it comes to saving rhinoceros. Their role is significant and critical to the survival of the species.

Many of the daily tasks involved in being a keeper make such a difference, but sometimes that realization is difficult. This presents a problem.

Keepers Saving Rhinos

Keepers work hard to provide the best husbandry care possible to their animals. This knowledge is an excellent foundation, along with data provided by their zoo, to aid when speaking to the public. Facts are important, but a simple story personalizing a rhino may leave an impression that can last a lifetime. What they eat, how often, how much or a funny fact can go a long way in creating interest in conservation. Every person we teach about rhinos is potentially someone who will care enough to help save the species. By sharing information with the public, keepers are helping to save rhinos.

Keepers are excellent observers accustomed to detecting subtle changes in an animal's physical or psychological condition. These attributes are extremely useful to researchers. Without the insight and help of keepers through various collection processes, many critical research projects that make a significant difference in the survival of the species would not be successful. By providing assistance in research projects and breeding programs, keepers are helping to save rhinos.

Keepers can be the grass root force in standardizing new approaches to conservation by creating new ways or expanding existing efforts to provide resources for proven conservation projects. This can encompass a variety of methods. Development of community based fund raising projects increases both awareness and financial support of our efforts. The projects these funds benefit help to promote real solutions for the species. By providing a critical link from the captive animal population to the animals in the wild, keepers are helping to save rhinos.

Conclusion

The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) currently estimates that there are 5,000 zookeepers in the United States. These jobs often pay very little, require working long hours and are very demanding.

With the expansion of knowledge and responsibility, being a keeper is not only fascinating but can be considered a rewarding career. Your efforts in conservation make you an invaluable link in the fight to help save the endangered species of the world.

Resources

International Rhino Foundation www.rhinos-irf.org

World Wildlife Fund www.worldwildlife.org/rhinos

US Fish and Wildlife Services www.fws.gov

SOS Rhinos www.sosrhino.org

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy www.lewa.org/rhino_conservation

AAZK Bowling for Rhinos www.aazkbfr.org

IUCN Species Survival Commission www.iucn.org

Asian Rhino Project www.asianrhinos.org.au