



*The newsletter for rhino
professionals*

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November 2012

THE CRASH

International Rhino Keeper Association

NOTE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL RHINO KEEPER ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

I can't believe another year has passed us by and, unfortunately, not a good one for rhinos. Although this year has been difficult, there are some amazing conservation success stories. For instance, we can feel great pride and a sense of accomplishment in rhino conservation with the birth of "Andatu" and the first Greater One Horned calf born as part of the translocation project under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 project. These are just two of the projects that are producing success stories through the International Rhino Foundation, which I hope our members will talk about during keeper presentations, public interactions, etc.

The IRKA continues to serve its membership by expanding the professional development program to include more hosting institutions and planning the 2013 Rhino Keeper Workshop which will be held in San Diego and hosted by our friends of San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Some of us that have been involved with the IRKA for a number of years and attended Rhino Keeper Workshops, and it is wonderful to see how these things have developed and improved over the years, as well as to hear compliments that our Rhino Keeper Workshops are one of the best out there. The Rhino Keeper Workshop in 2013 promises to be one of our best workshops, attracting a diversity of speakers and will have presentations that will not only be informative, but will help us as keepers and grow as professionals. We feel these workshops are the foundation of our organization and each year devote a significant portion of our funding towards scholarships to help you attend, so please take advantage of them.

I would like to thank a particular group over this last year that has

reached out and become an integral part of this organization and that is our Correspondence Committee, led by our own Wendy Shaffstall. At the last workshop, the board discussed reaching out to our members on a more personal level and this group has done that, and continues to do that. The committee members are Alisa Sandor (now chair of this committee), Christine Stephan and Jonnie Capiro. Jonnie has done an amazing job with Facebook and constantly keeps it up-to-date. Alissa, Christine and Wendy have been reaching out and contacting institutions when major events happen such as a birth, new exhibit opening, etc. and to offer support and encouragement during the tough times as well. I think this group is going to be a key to separating our organization from the rest and encourage you to contact them with things you feel are important so we can add it to our list. If you have had a birth or major event happen and did not hear from us it is because either we did not know about it, or we did not have a contact person. The IRKA would like to celebrate your successes with you, so please keep us informed and we will do our part.

Lastly, I would like to thank those folks who participated with a World Rhino Day Event. Each year this event is getting bigger and bigger and there were a lot of organizations out there doing their part to spread the word of rhinos.

Hope to see you in May.

Adam Felts

President, IRKA

DETAILS FOR THE 2013 RHINO KEEPER WORKSHOP

Written by Jane Kennedy

The 2013 Rhino Keeper Workshop will be held May 5-9, at the Town and Country Resort, San Diego Ca. A pre-conference trip to the Los Angeles Zoo and post-conference trip to SeaWorld San Diego are in the works. Speakers will focus on both in-situ and ex-situ conservation and research, pathology, breeding, and hand-rearing. The visit to the zoo will feature a behind the scenes look at our pathology lab, and group discussion on rhino pathology. During the Safari Park tour a break out session with classroom and hands-on rhino training will be optionally offered. (20 people maximum.) Tours of our state of the art research facility-The Institute for Conservation Research, the Beckman Veterinary Hospital and our field enclosures visiting all 4 species of rhinos will highlight the day. (We house over 1,500 mammals including 1.6 greater one-horned, 2.1 black, 2.6 southern and 1.1 northern white rhinos; we expect 3 more rhino calves by May of 2013.)

Cinco de Rhino, a Mexican themed fund-raiser will support Rhino Protection Units in South Africa. A separate private reception will be held for Workshop attendees.

Scheduled speakers include Dr. Amit Sharma, Dr. Dedi Chandra, and Dr. Oliver Ryder discussing stem cell research on northern white rhinos; Dr. Chris Tubbs will present a follow up discussion on white rhino phyto-estrogen receptors. SSP coordinators Randy Rieches-GOHRs, and Adam Eyers-SWRs will be discussing rhino transfers. Additionally there will be sixteen 20 to 30 minute speaker spots and up to 12-5 minute facility focuses. Each facility focus will be a short PowerPoint presentation on zoos or parks from around the world, focusing on their facility's work with rhinos. Keepers are encouraged to submit their facility for presentation early, as these spots will fill up quickly. This is a great way to "get your feet wet" by doing a PowerPoint presentation on your zoo. A template is available for anyone interested in sharing about their facility. An unlimited number of poster session spots are also available.

The night of the ending banquet at the Safari Park will also offer the opportunity to participate in the Park's "Roar-n-Snore" program. You will spend the night at the Safari Park campground, offering panoramic vistas of the Park's East

Rhino Keeper Workshop 2013



African field enclosure. (55 acres, over 140 animals from 11 species including 1.6 southern white rhinos and 19 giraffe.) After waking to the sounds of exotic animals you will receive private behind the scenes tours. This package is an additional cost and will be limited to 25 attendees. Your own transportation from the hotel is required.

Participating in the IRKA Keeper Development Program can enhance your stay, and help fund your trip here; professional members qualify for reimbursement funds! San Diego can accommodate up to 12 keepers who are interested in honing their keeper skills by working side by side with park or zoo keepers in San Diego; 6 pre-conference and 6 post-conference. (Not all will qualify for KDP scholarships so apply early!) You will work from a truck with your rhinos in huge exhibits housing hundreds of animals. You will learn how to work around large groups/herds of animals, field immobilization techniques, and field training methods. Visit the IRKA website for more details. We look forward to hosting all of you and hope to see you in San Diego next year!

For more details contact Jane Kennedy or Lance Aubery at jkennedy@sandiegozoo.org, laubery@sandiegozoo.org

WORLD RHINO DAY AT THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

Written by Stephanie Richmond,

The Saint Louis Zoo was proud to hold its first celebration of World Rhino Day in 2012 and looks forward to making this an annual event. The primary goal of the celebration was raising awareness about rhinos with a secondary goal of



fundraising to support rhino conservation in the wild.

The festivities were kicked off with a brownbag presentation, or lunchtime lecture, given a few days prior to World Rhino Day. The lecture talked about the Saint Louis Zoo's black rhino program, the status of rhinos in the wild, and gave an overview of conservation efforts currently underway. This lecture served to educate Zoo staff members and volunteers about the plight of the rhino and left everyone with a parting message of what they could do to help save these magnificent species. The hope was to inspire Zoo staff members and volunteers and then utilize them to help spread the message of rhino conservation to our visitors.

Leading up to World Rhino Day, posts were made



Kati Rain Painting , Photo Credit: Stephanie Richmond

on the Zoo's website and Facebook page, including photos and video of the Zoo's rhinos. In addition to all the festivities planned for the day, fundraising efforts were coordinated with the St. Louis American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) chapter. The Zoo's rhinos got in the spirit of the day by creating 20 Limited Edition paintings. Video of the rhinos painting with their prehensile lips was posted to the Zoo's website and Facebook page. Sales of these paintings will raise at least \$800 for rhino conservation. The paintings were made available for purchase at the brownbag presentation, at an after-hours volunteer lecture, and on the Zoo's website.

On World Rhino Day, visitors to the rhino habitat were met with a multifaceted celebration including: keeper chats, bio-facts, a rhino scout activity, rhino horn craft, a kid's activity sheet, and button and bookmark give-a-ways. As visitors first



Rhino Horn Craft , Photo Credit: Michael Abbene

approached, they passed a kid's craft table to get everyone excited about rhinos and World Rhino Day. At the craft table, staffed by Zoo teen volunteers, kids made paper rhino horns that they could tie onto their noses. They also were given an activity sheet that they could take home, which included a coloring page, a rhino-related word search, a rhino maze, and basic rhino information.

As visitors continued along the trail to the next activity station they were greeted by rhino scout trainers. Here, both kids and adults were encouraged to don a shuka (a colorful shawl worn by Samburu scouts in East Africa) and binoculars as they learned about what it takes to be a rhino scout in Africa. Presented with facts about our Zoo's rhinos, they were tasked



Scout Activity, Photo Credit: Michael Abbene

with identifying the rhino they spotted and learned how scouts play a critical role in protecting and conserving rhinos in Africa.

Visitors then focused their attention on a rhino skull and horn as they learned that rhino horn is not medicine and why it is important to save these amazing animals. Zoo keepers, educators and volunteers staffed this table which was flanked by educational posters (figure 6). One poster, titled “Rhinos of the World,” provided basic information on each of the five living rhino species, information on what the Saint Louis Zoo is doing to help rhinos and what “you” can do to help save them. In addition to the Zoo’s black rhinos being a part of the AZA Black Rhino Species Survival Plan© (SSP), the Saint Louis Zoo’s WildCare Institute’s Center for Conservation in the



World Rhino Day Pin

Photo Credit: Michael Abbene

Horn of Africa supports rhino conservation through the Northern Rangelands Trust in Kenya. This center for conservation was established to provide both in situ and ex situ conservation support for the wildlife of the Horn of Africa (for more information visit: www.stlzoo.org/)

conservation/wildcare-institute). Also, the St. Louis chapter of AAZK sponsors a Bowling for Rhinos event every year in May. The second poster contained information on each of the three black rhinos living at the zoo as well as photos of their daily care and training. Guests also had the opportunity to walk away with a pin featuring our female rhino and calf as well as an educational bookmark. The bookmark contained fun rhino facts, photos of all five species, and the important take home message of what “you” can do for rhinos.

The Saint Louis Zoo’s 2012 World Rhino Day celebration will conclude on October 1st, when the brown bag presentation will be repeated after hours for another group of Zoo docents and volunteers. Planning has already begun for next year. We can’t wait!



World Rhino Day bookmark

Photo Credit: Stephanie Richmond

IRKA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT VISIT TO THE DENVER ZOO

Written by Jonnie Capiro, Mammal Keeper, San Diego Zoo Safari Park

I rolled over to the sound of the alarm and felt panicked when I read 5:30 on the clock. Am I late? I thought. I usually get up at the un-godly hour of 4:30 am to get to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park by 6:00 to take care of all the animals in my area. I looked around and remembered that I was in Colorado and today I was going to work at the Denver Zoo! This wasn't just any visit; I was going to see some old rhino buddies that I had previously worked with at other facilities and learn about how they were doing in their brand new, high-tech Toyota Elephant Passage home.

I arrived at the front gate promptly at 7:00 am to meet Chris Bobko, my host for this week. She explained that we would get right to work, and then break in about an hour to catch up with the rest of the team for a daily morning meeting. We walked into the impressive, state of the art barn to be greeted by two old friends of mine. Both had lived in large, open outdoor settings in big social groups and I was impressed to see them immediately respond to our presence by approaching the bars and begging for food – oh, silly, greater-one-horned rhinos, it's always about the food!

First, we met Bandhu, the 3-year-old male we shipped out from San Diego Zoo Safari Park last Thanksgiving. He looked noticeably bigger and his horn was growing nicely into the broad, characteristic shape of a male rhino's horn. Bandhu promptly greeted us and was super friendly. I knew instantly that he had acclimated well to his new surroundings.

Transports can be tough on animals and we had a difficult time getting him crate trained last year. Additionally, moving a rhino from a larger, more social setting like the Safari Park, to a more traditional zoo setting can be a pretty big change for the animal. Bandhu's move was recommended for him to be paired with Tensing, a beautiful female from the Wilds.

This partnership is especially interesting to me for two reasons: I worked with both of these rhinos in their previous facilities and secondly, the research study that I conducted at the Wilds was about translocation and its effects on glucocorticoid activity and its relationship to animal management. It was great that I had known both of these rhinos in their former social settings before they were



Chris Bobko working with Bandhu

transported and was seeing them after their arrival at their new home.

Seeing this lively little rhino, I never would have guessed he was the same animal I knew from the Safari Park! His keepers report that he's been really easy to work with since day one, and in the last month or so he's really turned into a puppy dog of a rhino. I'm sure you know the type. Tensing is coming along well after a more difficult transition. She approached us and was interested in our attention. She looked so much bigger than the last time I saw her, which was well over two years ago. It's obvious that the keepers at the Denver Zoo LOVE these two rhinos!

After getting reacquainted with Bandhu and Tensing we went about a typical daily zoo routine: cleaning, quick morning meeting, more cleaning, shifting animals onto exhibit, hosing out barns, preparing diets, and training sessions. However, there is something truly unique about the Denver Zoo; their new Toyota Elephant Passage area. They have Asian elephants, the two rhinos, a couple of Malayan tapirs, clouded leopards, gibbons, Asian small clawed otters, a pair of black rhinos and two hippos that live in the pachyderm area. During my visit, the keepers were gracious enough to show me their areas and let me meet all the animals. I have to admit, the playful otters stole the show!

Just like most other facilities, the day began with a morning meeting that was a crucial part of the day for this specific team of keepers. The new exhibits and barns are so complex that through a system of shift gates, walkways and even a bridge, the elephants and rhinos can actually be shifted onto any of five separate yards. It was a little confusing at first, but the different

options for exhibiting animals was really impressive. During the meeting, keepers talked about which animal would go in which exhibit for the day. Communication is critical and it was quite obvious that this team trusts one another and can work very closely to achieve daily goals. It was decided that Bandhu would go in yard 1 that has a nice big pool and lots of mud wallows, and Tensing would have access to the barn and big yard all day.

Later on that day, we discussed training projects, breeding plans and options, and what the future would hold for this cute little rhino pair. It was nice to see them and the new exhibit as part of the bigger picture of the greater one-horned rhino SSP. There are so many collaborative efforts



Jonnie setting up hay diets in the demo area that has a pool

that are needed to create a new exhibit, start a breeding program, and comfortably house these incredibly important animals. Indian rhinos are a new species for Denver and it was nice to be able to share some of Bandhu and Tensing's previous husbandry info and anecdotes. It was also reassuring to them to hear about some of the intricacies of caring for Indian rhinos, as compared to the African species of rhino, which are much different in temperament, medical needs, reproductive activity, and courtship behaviors.

I spent the next two days at the zoo helping with the routine, getting to know the keepers, and learning as much as I could about the goals and expectations for this new program, and the challenges they have met thus far. Another interesting part of visiting another zoo is watching the dynamics among the team. I was impressed with how thoughtful and communicative the keepers were with one another. They explained that due to the unique barn and yard structure that they have to be able to communicate effectively and they depend on each other all the time.

On the last day of my visit, I was fortunate enough to see some of the features of this innovative exhibit in action. The keepers shifted Bandhu across a pathway that crossed over part of the public area. There were giant, elephant proof gates that swung shut into a chute for Bandhu to exit one yard and enter another. Although it was still quite early and no guests were present, it was easy to see that this would be a memorable part of any zoo visitor's experience. Later that day, the keepers shifted him across a bridge that went directly over zoo visitors, allowing Bandhu access to the far yard, equipped with a huge pool where the elephant demonstrations occur. It was great to see all of these features in use and to observe how enriching this type of environment is for the animals.

I had a wonderful visit and was able to share my experiences working with these two rhinos in the past while acquiring new information to take back to the Safari Park. The keepers were gracious hosts, allowing me to tag along, ask endless questions, and help out in their barn for a few days. Many thanks to the IRKA for offering this opportunity and helping coordinate this visit, the keepers in the Toyota Elephant Passage area of the Denver Zoo, and to Chris Bobko and Dale Leeds for letting me tag along for a few days.



Bandhu , a greater one-horned rhino

LETTER OF APPRECIATION TO THE CORRESPONDENCE COMMITTEE

Written by Sheelagh Antrobus, Skydive for Rhinos 2012 R10million campaign , Project Rhino KZN Secretariat

Dear Alisa and all involved at the IRKA.

Thank you for this message and for recognizing the Skydive for Rhinos campaign in South Africa; to know that our efforts – and those of hundreds of extra-ordinary South Africans who have enthusiastically carried the message of the rhino poaching crisis to tens of thousands of people around the world and helped us raise just over R6million for sustainable, national rhino anti-poaching needs – is comfort to my unhappy heart. World Rhino Day this year in South Africa turned out to be a time of massacre: it was as if the poaching syndicates deliberately timed their incursions to coincide with this international day of awareness – an inflammatory move with the message: ‘you can’t stop us’.

22 September saw us in South Africa’s beautiful Cape Province, for the 4th event of this national campaign that is based on ‘ordinary South Africans doing something extraordinary for SA’s rhinos’. We started just before dawn with the TV cameras of South Africa’s most popular early-morning news show on site and were given 1.5 hours of free national TV coverage to highlight the rhino poaching crisis and the lengths ordinary South African citizens are prepared to go to, to voice their concern about what is happening to this iconic species. This media coverage was in addition to the free national radio and press coverage that Skydive for Rhinos had already attracted. It was a beautiful spring day and the participants, media and spectators alike used the event to acknowledge our role in the international World Rhino Day efforts.

The Monday after World Rhino Day was a public holiday in South Africa - Heritage Day (24 September): another symbolic day as rhinos are part of our national heritage and it was my turn to take to the skies. (I wasn’t able to previously, as I broke my coccyx the day before we launched this national campaign on 27 July – putting paid to my plan to tandem skydive at every event alongside the good people who had put so much faith in us and this campaign.) That day was supposed to be the culmination of this year-long, national campaign that has been organized and managed by a core team of just 4 people, with the help of a handful of volunteers and SA’s professional skydiving community - who have now



In South Africa, Skydive for Rhinos was joined by Rhino Africa and others for a once-in-a-lifetime World Rhino Day jump. Photo courtesy of Rhino Africa.

become the rhinos’ newest supporters. I woke up that morning looking forward to being on the very last plane load of people symbolically taking the rhinos’ message to the skies above South Africa. But two hours before we jumped from 10,000ft, the joy turned to pain with a message from my friend and colleague Elise Daffue, founder of StopRhinoPoaching.com, telling me of the discovery of 9 rhinos brutally killed in KwaZulu-Natal over the previous 48 hours, a further 4 in the Eastern Cape (tranquilized before the horns were removed whilst they were still alive) and others around the country. She was in tears; she said she hated having to give me the news, knowing I was about to do something for rhinos that I’d waited 10 months to do – but realized I would rather hear the bad news immediately, than be kept in the dark – especially because I am also the coordinator of Project Rhino KZN and the worst killings had happened in my home province, whilst I was far away from home.

I did skydive for rhinos with the campaign’s core team and the pilot and skydiving professionals who have given their hearts to this crisis, but it was a bittersweet experience. What right did I have to be experiencing the joys of flying free, when fresh carcasses of the very species I and my colleagues were doing all of this for, were bleeding into the soil of this beautiful country? What right did I have to ask so many people to support this campaign – yet not be able to deliver on stopping the slaughter on World Rhino Day? I felt utterly defeated, powerless and desolate.

That feeling is with me still but it is now a provocation - and I'm not alone: our tired team has found fresh legs and we are going to keep going until we've hit our target of raising R10million. We are organizing an additional Skydive for Rhinos event that will take place on 10-11 November and are looking at taking this campaign to the UK and other countries where ordinary people want to show their support to what is happening in South Africa in an extra-ordinary way.

At the same time, we're turning our attention to the distribution of the funds raised. Already, we've increased aerial surveillance capability by the purchase and ongoing operational funding for two light aircraft that will provide support to more than 500 rhinos in KZN, and a large Black rhino population in the Eastern Cape. We are going to be funding the training of reserve managers and rangers who have proved their worth, in advanced anti-poaching strategies at a national level. We will be providing funding support for desperately needed APU equipment in hot-spot regions, and we will be working with reserves who are committed to building good relations with their neighboring communities, to gain their trust and support for rhinos and conservation in general.

But that is not enough. We were aware when we started planning this national campaign a year ago, that R10million was a drop in the ocean and that all we would be doing, was buying time - we wouldn't stop the poaching. We've been honest with our 'Rhino Skydivers' about this... and sometimes (many times), we've wondered if this campaign will really make a difference? What has kept us going however, is the realization that if we don't - who will? Plus, the ordinary citizen deserves to be heard and given an opportunity to play their role, no matter how small it may be: we planned this campaign to give them a voice and the chance for personal involvement - I think we've done that to some degree of success. We've made mistakes but at the same time, we've learned so much this year. One of the biggest realizations is that if South Africa - and the world - is going to stop this extinction taking place, it is going to take a lot more than what is currently being done. And we are going to have to stop re-inventing the wheel and come up with new ways of counteracting the problem. We need sustainable solutions. We need fresh, daring and innovative partnerships that combine skills from a variety of sectors. Raising funds is one thing - making a sustainable difference is another: the Skydive for Rhinos team is now exploring some interesting, sustainable, new ideas with remarkable people who have come forward, thanks to this campaign.

We need action that is not tied to long, drawn-out debates that leave a trail of bloody carcasses before action is taken. We need to stop thinking in terms of polarity ('them' and 'us') and realize that polarity exacerbates the problem. We need to find the strength to fight back proactively, instead of responding reactively. Importantly, we need to learn how to embrace the passion of the public and the goodwill of individuals - because it is there, waiting to be accepted. We need 21st century solutions. And we need to learn to listen to people outside of the conservation sector because they have ideas to share that can make a difference.

I am not a rhino expert: I'm just an ordinary person who couldn't stand back any longer and do nothing. My amazing Skydive for Rhinos colleagues - 21-year old Micah van Schalkwyk, skydiving professional/ logistics expert Mike Rumble and 19-year old volunteer John Gilbert - are also not experts. But we have gained incredible knowledge - knowledge that I hope will be embraced and used for many years to come. Regardless of age or background, what they are - are extraordinary people who stepped out of their comfort zones, were not inhibited by their lack of conservation qualifications, were prepared to act on their deep-rooted



**Sheelagh Antrobus and Micah van Schalkwyk of the African Conservation Trust on behalf of Project Rhino KZN with Rolston, the Project Rhino KZN mascot.
Photo courtesy of Durban North News**

passion for Africa's wilderness and offer their skills - however disparate they may be. They are perfect examples of the hundreds of thousands of new-thinking people around the world who do not want to be part of an uncaring human race that destroys everything in its path. They were prepared to make enormous personal sacrifices to make this campaign the success it is already - and will continue to be.

Conservation - rhino conservation in particular - is no longer domain of just a few good men and women battling alone, against all odds: the world wants to embrace the rhino crisis as urgent and necessary. We just need to learn how to say 'Yes'.

Regards

Sheelagh Antrobus | Skydive for Rhinos 2012 R10million campaign |
Project Rhino KZN Secretariat

THE 2013 RHINO CONSERVATION CALENDAR

The International Rhino Keeper Association (IRKA) and the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) have produced the Rhino Conservation Calendar for the second year in a row. The first ever Rhino Conservation Calendar, raised \$9,667 for IRF's "Operation: Stop Poaching Now" Campaign. The sale of the 2013 Rhino Conservation Calendar will assist the Rhino Foundation of Indonesia (Yayasan Badak Indonesia or YABI). YABI oversees the management of the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) on Sumatra, a captive breeding program for the species. The funds raised will assist in covering the core costs of the SRS: staff salaries, vehicle running costs, keeper & veterinary costs, veterinary supplies, non-browse nutritional supplements, & facility maintenance.

The SRS is a 250-acre complex located within Way Kambas National Park in Sumatra. At the SRS, the rhinos reside in large, open areas where they experience a natural rainforest habitat while still receiving state of the art veterinary care & nutrition. Four adult rhinos are part of an intensively managed research & breeding program aimed at increasing our knowledge about the Sumatran rhino with the ultimate aim of increasing the population in the wild. On June 23, 2012, the first baby was born at the SRS, a male named Andatu, who is featured on the cover of the 2013 Rhino Conservation Calendar. The calendars can be purchased on IRKA's website www.rhinokeeperassociation.org!



INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTERS

The Supporting Institutional Membership is for any conservation organization, or zoological institution which supports rhino conservation in

accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These memberships are available for \$100, \$500 and \$2000. Why should your zoo

be interested in joining on this level? If your institution contributes on the \$500 level then all rhino keepers membership fees at your zoo are

waived! It is important that as the IRKA grows that we

continue to garner the support from all facilities that are responsible for the protection

and management of all species of rhinoceros. We would like to extend our appreciation for this substantial support to the following institutions,

and hopefully we can add your zoo to this growing list! If you have questions about institutional memberships or any other questions

please contact us at

internationalrhinokeeperassoc@gmail.com.

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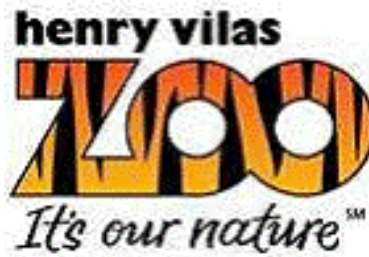
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