

## The New IRKA Training Committee: Joe Hauser, Buffalo Zoo

As the Training Committee has its first articles in the CRASH for the International Rhino Keeper Association, I would like to introduce everyone to the committee members.

- \* Joe Hauser, Lead Rhino Keeper, Buffalo Zoo
- \* Jane Kennedy, Lead CHS Mammal Keeper, San Diego Safari Park, and IRKA President
- \* Jason Pootoolal, Hoofstock Supervisor/Head Rhino Keeper, African Lion Safari, Ontario
- \* Mike Connolly, Zoological Manager -Pachyderms/Hoofstock, Tulsa Zoo
- \* Carly Barron, Animal Keeper, at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore

For the first articles of the Training Committee, Mike Connolly, Jason Pootoolal, and Carly Barron, wrote about how they were successful at training their Southern White rhinos to give voluntary blood draws. It explains a few different ways this behavior can be trained, as well as adding pictures to show how it was achieved. Being able to draw blood could be a very valuable behavior to train captive rhinos for a number of reasons. Hopefully by reading these articles, it will give you a good idea how to go about this with the rhinos under your care.

## White Rhino Blood draws at the African Lion Safari: Jason Pootoolal

African Lion Safari has a crash of 2.3 southern white rhinos. These rhinos are exhibited in a 60 acre mixed species display and are brought into a large heated barn nightly. This daily routine of going in and out of the barn necessitates a good amount of time of keepers working directly with the rhinos and provides the opportunity to enable valuable research.

All pens in the barn share a common hall, which is equipped with a hydraulic restrainer. Our rhinos pass through this every day to move pen to pen and also to enter the outdoor paddocks. The rhinos were then offered their daily pelleted diet along with treats when they stopped in the restrainer. Building on this positive association we gradually closed the doors around the rhino, holding the rhino for longer and longer periods of time. The rhinos have come to accept the restrainer as it is where they are fed their daily diet supplemented by treats and positive keeper attention (rubs!).

We were ultrasounding our female rhinos on a regular basis and correlating the images observed with behavior in the field and to hormonal analysis of fecal samples collected. We then decided to condition the rhinos for blood collection so we could monitor the hormones using serum, as well as being able to use blood in diagnosing health concerns. Storing and shipping samples was also easier.

The first method we used was collecting blood from their ear veins. Since we had already used tactile stimulation all over their head during training as a form of positive interaction, holding and manipulating the ear was simple. We began washing their ears with a hot wet washcloth and would hold it on their ear to raise the veins. From this point we stuck the vein with a 23 or 21 gauge butterfly winged infusion set. The rhinos did not display any negative reactions to this stimulus. Being able to hold and manipulate the ear allowed us to collect the blood without the apparatus coming out due to 'ear waving' by the rhino. Blood was collected by connecting a syringe to the butterfly and drawing back in a slow and uniform speed to protect the ear vein.

During this time we were working on producing a white rhino calf using artificial insemination. As part of this procedure the ear was being used repeatedly for the standing sedations induced to inseminate the rhinos. We decided it would be prudent to condition the rhinos for blood collection from the front leg.

As with the ear we were already rubbing our rhinos down in the restrainer. We began using the same hot water and washcloth method to clean the site on the leg and hold it to the injection location. Desensitizing the rhinos to the initial prick was accomplished with a blunted needle pushed firmly to the site. Once the rhinos were tolerating this we began using a 21 gauge butterfly winged infusion set and syringe to collect blood.



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