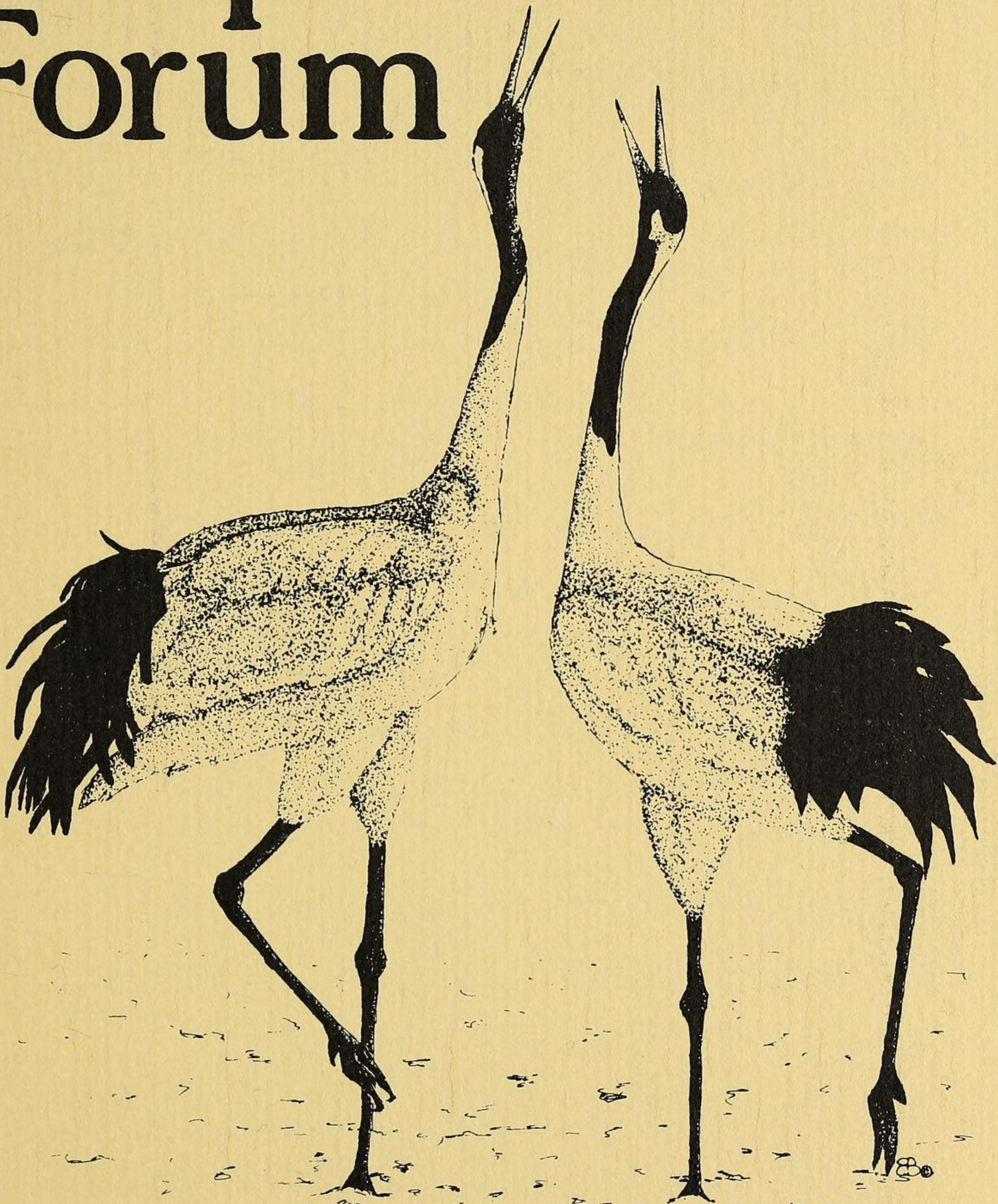


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Animal Keepers' Forum



dedicated to Professional Animal Care



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KEEPERS AND ZOO RESEARCH

By

Karen Wachs, Research Assistant
Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati, OH

The Cincinnati Zoo's African Plains exhibit is home to some pretty illustrious ungulates. First, there's an eland by the name of "E.T." - she was born in 1983 to an eland surrogate, becoming the first exotic animal born following a nonsurgical embryo transfer. Then there's another eland named "Frostee", born more than two years after being conceived! As an embryo she was held in frozen storage for nearly 1½ years prior to being transferred to an eland surrogate for gestation. And what about the bongo antelope twins "L.A. Delay" and "T.C."? These animals were born six days apart in June 1984 to two different surrogates, one of which was not even a member of the same species. They had been collected at the seven-day-old embryo stage from a female bongo at the Los Angeles Zoo and hand-carried in a test tube across the continent back to Cincinnati where they were transferred into surrogates for gestation.

What do these animals have in common? They are all a part of the history-making reproductive research efforts of the Cincinnati Wildlife Research Federation (CWRWF). The CWRWF was formed in 1981 by the Cincinnati Zoo, Kings Island Wild Animal Habitat, and the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, with the goal of furthering the propagation of endangered species. Since its beginning, the Federation has made significant strides in reproductive research and has become a leader in the application of embryo transfer to exotic animals.

Another common bond that these embryo transfer animals share is that they are each living under the watchful eye of Steve Romo. Most people associated with the Cincinnati Zoo know Steve. In his 14 years of work as a full-time zoo keeper, his expertise in animal management and care has become finely honed. As head keeper of the veldt and deer line at the Cincinnati Zoo, Steve is responsible for the care of over 100 animals.

Steve takes his job very seriously. His interest in animals is much more than a livelihood - it is a way of life. Most of his vacations have been spent traveling to zoos and game preserves throughout the world to learn all that he can about the safe capture, care and transport of exotic animals, especially ungulates. He has picked up a great deal of expertise from the friends and contacts he has made during his travels, including two very well-known and experienced animal people - Tony Parkinson and John Seago.

The Zoo has been responsible for sending Steve on some interesting international adventures as well. Two years ago, the Zoo sent Steve to Malaysia for two months to work with the Malaysian Wildlife Department in the care of a rare Sumatran rhino that had been rescued from a rubber plantation. This past Fall, Steve was sent to Antwerp to work with zoo officials there in caring for some okapi which eventually will be sent to the Cincinnati Zoo. These animals had been airlifted from Zaire to Belgium on the first leg of their journey to Cincinnati.

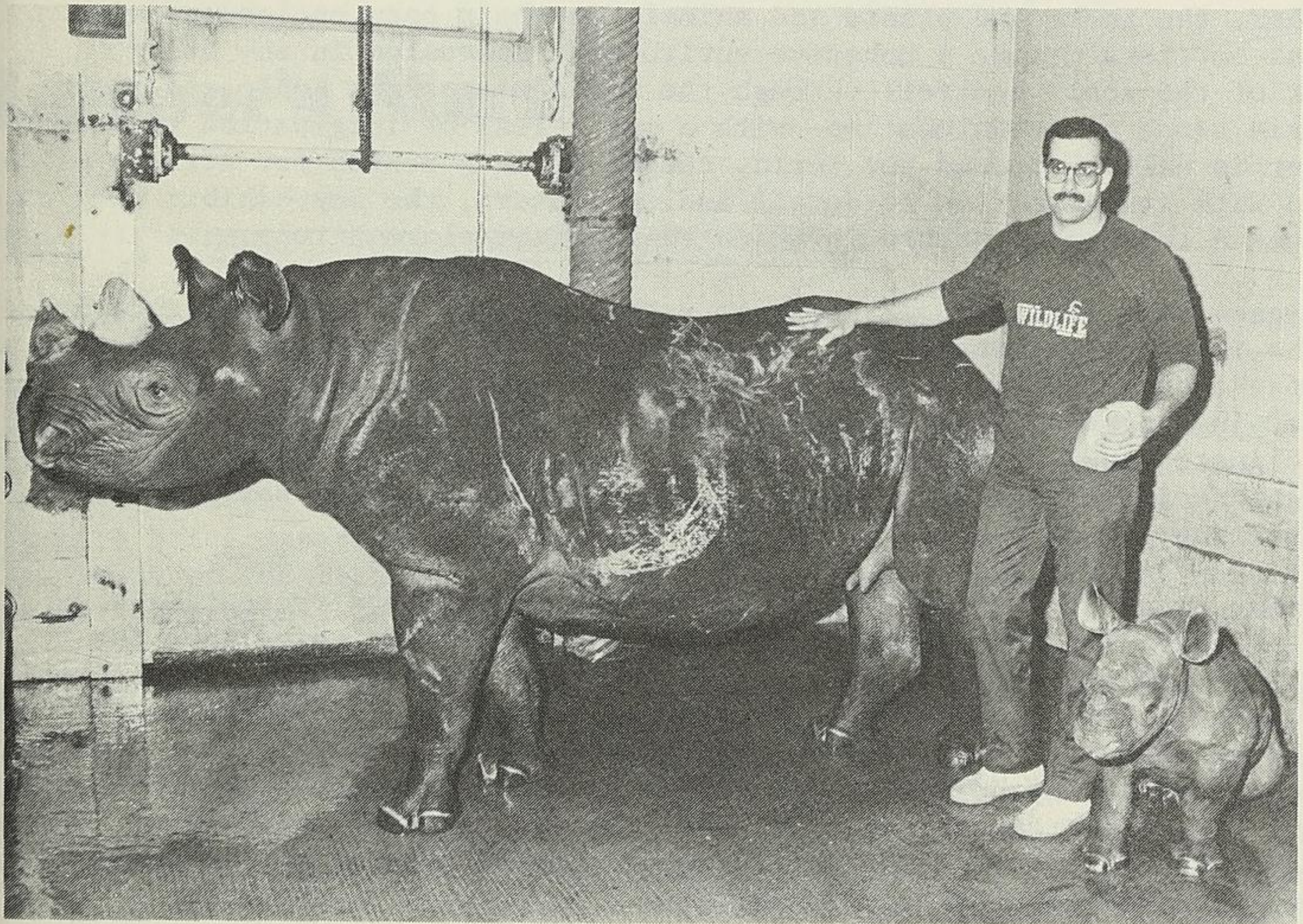
Steve's association with CWRWF began a number of years ago. One of his first projects was to obtain a daily vaginal smear from the Zoo's female bongo so that Research Director, Dr. Betsy Dresser, and her colleagues at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine could chart her estrous cycle. As you might imagine, this was no easy task. It took two months

KEEPERS AND ZOO RESEARCH, *Continued*

of conditioning before this animal would allow Steve to approach her and obtain the daily smear. If you think that trying to condition a bongo antelope would be difficult and dangerous, how about conditioning a 3000-pound rhinoceros! After spending six months in a painstakingly slow conditioning process, Steve was able to begin obtaining daily milk samples from Princess, one of the Zoo's two female black rhinos. Steve collected milk samples for a 14-month period to help in the development of a formula for feeding young rhinos who must be hand-raised.

Conditioning an animal requires a great deal of patience, hard work and guts! It must be done completely on the animal's terms so that a familiar routine can be set up, and the animal can develop trust in the handler. Steve laughs as he considers whether he has conditioned the animals, or they have conditioned him!

Steve believes in the work that the CWRP is doing and has drummed up support for its research efforts among many of his contacts throughout the world. His first concern has always been the well-being of the animals under his care, and his animal management skills have made him an integral part of the CWRP team. His relationship with Dr. Dresser is a solid one based on friendship and mutual respect. The CWRP is very lucky to have Steve on its team.



Keeper Steve Romo preparing to collect a milk sample from female rhino at the Cincinnati Zoo. Analysis of the milk samples is making possible the development of a substitute rhino milk formula to be used in hand-rearing rhino babies. (Photo credit: Ron Austing)

