

The joy of working with rhinos in zoos

Rhinos are impressive animals, but difficult to find in the wild and the costs of a safari can make them inaccessible to many. Yet encountering a rhino at a zoo can be just as special. Today, zoos play a major role in rhino conservation.

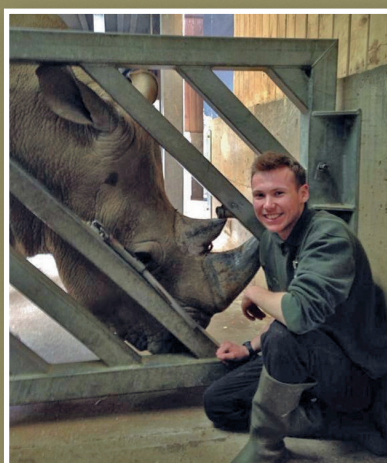
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Every European zoo with rhinos that is accredited by EAZA manages its rhinos as part of a coordinated breeding programme. Through the programme, zoos work together to safeguard genetic diversity for different rhino species, breeding healthy animals to develop 'insurance populations' for the wild. A number of recent successes have meant that many zoos are now sending rhinos 'back' to their natural homes in other parts of the world.

This may sound relatively simple, but coordinating and executing such breeding programmes is a lot of hard work, and can only happen thanks to highly engaged rhino keepers.

Rhino keepers are somehow special. They have the ability to understand 'rhino language', know everything about the animal's daily needs, know what to feed and when, and identify when and how to put a female and male together for breeding. For each rhino species, we have specific best-practice guidelines within the EAZA Endangered Species Programmes.

These compile a huge amount of information collected from many zoos and experts regarding rhino biology, husbandry, diet, management and veterinarian care. They are our books of wisdom. A good keeper also has a very close relationship with the animals. Yelling or shouting are no-goes: a nice word or a gentle tap on the bum can work wonders. A rhino that trusts its keeper will melt away in joy during a nice scratching session! Contrary to many people's beliefs, a rhino's skin is very sensitive. A good keeper knows exactly when to 'ask' a rhino to lay down for blood sampling, without sedation but in full trust.



Rhino keepers and their beloved white rhinos at Colchester Zoo.

Working together, zoos across Europe coordinate the management of rhinos in their care.

These precious moments can only be topped by the birth of a calf. As you know, rhino babies are impressively cute. All hard work is forgotten immediately when a calf is born and the mother allows her calf to wander off to greet the keeper for the first time. It is a magical time for keepers and zoo visitors alike.

Visiting a zoo and meeting a rhino close up for the first time, or observing a caring female with her offspring, or even seeing young bulls engaging in play fights, can bring profound emotions. These special moments help to raise awareness and connect more people to rhinos and why they need our support.



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