

# The Crash

## March 2020 "The Spring Edition"

The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connecting rhino keepers.

### President's Perspective

I'm sure while many of you that are reading this issue of the CRASH, you are living in a different sort of world since the last issue of the newsletter. Many of us around the world have changed the way we live to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, we are also responsible for the animals under our care and continue to provide exceptional care during this difficult time. This isn't only effecting one facility or one country, but every one of us around the world. The IRKA has made a couple changes during this time while the coronavirus is spreading. We have postponed the 2020 Training and Enrichment Regional Seminar that is being hosted by the Oklahoma City Zoo, and postponed our annual Board of Directors meeting that was going to be held this April.

In this issue of the CRASH, Jade Tuttle has put together some photos of the rhino calves that have been born in 2019. I hope you can get a little stress relief looking at these photos and seeing how successful the rhino breeding programs have done this year.

While the IRKA has made a couple donations recently to the International Rhino Foundation in support of the Sumatran Rhino Rescue and the habitat restoration project in Indonesia, we also wanted to make a contribution to African rhino conservation. In early 2020 we made a donation of \$5,000 to Stop Rhino Poaching, based in South Africa. If you were able to attend the 2019 Rhino Keeper Workshop, then you were lucky enough to hear both Elise and Chris Serfontein speak about the great work Stop Rhino Poaching does and the challenges they come across. The \$5,000 that was donated went towards training the anti-poaching units about the basic practical knowledge of legal principals to allow them to become more efficient in the field. I'm glad the IRKA could make a contribution to African rhino conservation and support the great work they do. If you want to learn more about Stop Rhino Poaching, I encourage you to visit their website at [www.stoprhinopoaching.com](http://www.stoprhinopoaching.com).

I hope everyone stays healthy and stays safe out there!

-Joe



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The International Rhino Keeper Association is excited to announce the 2021 Rhino Keeper Workshop will be hosted by [FOTA wildlife park](#) in Carrigtwohill, Ireland!

**Save the Date: June 13th-17th, 2021**  
The Metropole Hotel Cork

Fota Wildlife Park is a 100-acre (40 ha) wildlife park located on Fota Island, near Carrigtwohill, County Cork, Ireland. Opened in 1983, it is an independently funded, not-for-profit charity that is one of the leading tourism, wildlife and conservation attractions in Ireland.

## Water Picking a Black Rhino's Teeth

### Reaching Big Training Goals with a Small Team

Here at White Oak Conservation, our small team of rhino wildlife specialists care for 2.1 Southern Black Rhinoceros. Our oldest and most nervous, Lee, is twenty-six years old and has had notable dental concerns since 2006. His symptoms (which have fluctuated and changed over the years) include wadding and spitting up of hay, bad breath, weight loss and difficulty eating grain with diet changes making little to no difference at times. He was first immobilized in February 2006 for a dental exam which resulted in his first tooth extraction. Since the first procedure, he has been immobilized several times due to chronic and progressive dental disease resulting in a total of five extractions on his right side, two maxillary and three mandibular teeth. We are fortunate to work with equine and exotic dentist Dr. Michael Lowder from the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia who has been present for many of Lee's procedures. Some of you may remember Dr. Lowder from the 2019 Rhino Keeper Workshop at Disney's Animal Kingdom!



During an immobilization in November of 2018 for another dental exam, a tooth was extracted and vets noted "the continued extraction of teeth is likely remodeling the mandible and will further predispose this animal for the need for further extractions", along with a significant amount of plaque build-up in his mouth. The suggested treatment; to "attempt to train for water picking the teeth under behavioral restraint to clear up the current draining areas as well as prevent build-up of calculus". That's where our team stepped up. We set forth with the task of training Lee to not only hold open his mouth for dental examinations without sedation, but to also condition him to the spraying of pressurized water in to his mouth in an effort to remove plaque build-up and keep his remaining teeth as healthy as possible.

As a small team that cares for many rhinos in large habitats (we manage herds of greater one horned and white rhinos in addition to the black rhinos), finding the time for regular training sessions is a challenge. We need to train in short sessions that aren't too time consuming. Being a conservation center, our focus is managing larger herds of animals in big, naturalistic spaces while training and artificial enrichment are not necessarily our key focus. Any training we do must be simple and easy to transfer from one keeper to another. We are training Lee without a chute and using only behavioral restraint. Our water pick apparatus was purchased from various hardware stores and assembled on site for under thirty dollars.



The first goal of this training is to build on his established open mouth behavior by asking for larger opens for a longer duration to allow for visual examination of his premolars and molars, reducing the necessity of an immobilization. Our second goal was to desensitize Lee to the rinsing or water picking of his remaining teeth in an effort to remove plaque and debris and to reduce the severity and progression of gum disease. Ultimately, we want to reduce the need to extract more teeth.

We began this training shortly after his November immobilization, and for a nervous rhino it has been a slow process. To start, he was reinforced for opening his mouth widely, eventually holding out for longer duration. We then introduced the rinsing apparatus, a garden hose with a spray nozzle and attachment that allows us to control the spray diameter and pressure (see photo). It took some time for him to get comfortable with the hose nozzle being in his mouth, let alone the sensation of pressurized water spraying in to his mouth. This process alone took several weeks.

In March of 2019, Lee was immobilized for a routine physical and dental exam. He was also moved to a new habitat. During the examination, Dr. Lowder noted purulent material surrounding a mandibular premolar but we opted not to remove the tooth. Following the procedure and move, Lee had a difficult adjustment and was more anxious. The team did not train with him for nearly two months while he settled in to his new habitat, a small set back to say the least. Once we were able and he was willing, we resumed training and made some quick progress. After months of hard work from both Lee and our team, Lee now presents wider open mouths, allows keepers to rinse the top surfaces of his teeth and will even allow some manipulation of his cheeks for better molar viewing. We have even been able to dislodge a few chunks of plaque! Moving forward, we would like Lee to present his open mouth for thorough examination by both husbandry and vet teams and even allow for tools to be used to increase tooth visibility and cleaning.

We are still in the early stages of training this behavior in order to improve Lee's dental health and overall welfare. He seems to enjoy his sessions very much and over time has become more eager and participatory. Although Lee already had an open mouth behavior from previous training, we would still consider him a novice trainee making his advancement through this behavior very exciting. Our team is very proud to prove that you can teach an old rhino new tricks, especially considering our busy schedules and small staff. We are looking forward to what we can accomplish next.



**Sydney Roumbanis**  
White Oak Conservation Center

## Meet the Babies of 2019

There were 17 rhino calves born in 2019 and we think that is something to celebrate! We know you all have worked hard all year striving to bring the very best care and welfare for our rhinos and we wanted to bring you some joy of cuteness.

### **Behold: the "Calves of 2019" Centerfold**



Female GOH at Zoo Miami  
Photo: Tabitha Miller



Female black at Blank Park Zoo  
Photo: Shandy Mikkelsen



Male black at Lincoln Park Zoo  
Photo: Cassie Kutilek



Male GOH at Buffalo Zoo  
Photo: Joe Hauser



Female GOH at San Diego Safari Park  
Photo: Ken Bohn



Three female SWR!  
at White Oak Conservation Center  
Photo: Clarice Pfalzer



Female GOH at The Wilds  
Photo: Cody Cseplo



Male GOH at Henry Doorly Zoo  
Photo: Corissa Mangus



Female SWR at Taronga Western Plains  
Photo: Pascale Benoit



Female SWR at Lion Country Safari  
Photo: Ashleigh Kandrac



Male SWR at the Wilds  
Photo: Cody Cseplo



Male and female SWR  
at Sand Diego Safari Park  
Photo: Todd Schwenk



Female SWR at the Wilds  
Photo: Cody Cseplo



Male Eastern Black at Potters Park  
Photo: Adrianna Davidson

**Great job everyone!**  
It looks like we are well on our way to increasing the populations in 2020

IT IS BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE...

2019 was a good year for IRKA. Not only were we able to make two different donations to IRF's work in Asia, we have also just donated \$5000 to StopRhinoPoaching for their work training rangers in Africa. It is a small but dynamic South African organization that focuses on rangers, anti-poaching units, security, and managers, and that strengthens regional security and investigations.

**StopRhinoPoaching.com** is totally committed to helping protect and conserve rhinos in South Africa. They actively pursue this mission in the following ways:

- By seeking out, identifying, initiating and coordinating supportive projects for the safety of larger rhino populations.
- By supporting, wherever possible, existing rhino protection projects which fulfill our necessary qualifying criteria.
- By drawing on the input and guidance of respected rhino specialists and colleagues, while at all times working within the guidelines of the National Needs Analysis.
- By pursuing opportunities, encouraging like-minded sponsoring partnerships and broadening our areas of impact for the greater good of South Africa's rhinos.
- 



From Elise Serfontein, Founder of StopRhinoPoaching.com:

*"Thank you so much for your news of the \$5,000, it really means a lot. We talk often of our trip to Disney and all of you at IRKA with many fond memories. We really enjoyed our time with you and it meant a lot to us to be able to share what is happening here with people who genuinely care.*

*With regards to your very generous donation, one of the projects we will be running in 2020 is basic legal training for rangers. Here is a small write up on the training:"*



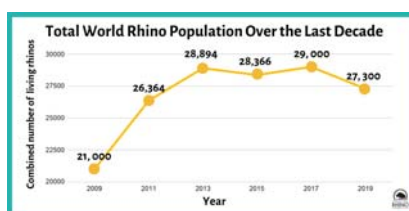
***This training is aimed to empower employees of organisations involved in anti-poaching and gives basic practical knowledge of legal principles in order to protect themselves and function more effectively in their environment. The contents of the training includes sections on writing of statements, searches and seizures, reporting of incidents, principles of private defence, Section 49 of the Criminal Procedures Act, arrests, constitutional rights etc. Rangers are under a lot of pressure and need to subscribe to the letter of the law, which is extremely stressful especially in night contact situations. This course really helps rangers as proper legal training within the context of their work, given by an advocate with many years of experience with rangers, gives a massive confidence boost to properly carry out their duties.***

[Visit their website](#)

*"I am going to start scheduling courses early in the new year as we already have funding to do 2 courses. I would dearly like to utilise the IRKA funds towards training as well as this would mean reaching more rangers across more reserves."*

**This donation is only possible because of the dedication of our membership to supporting rhinos and conservation**  
**Thank You**

## 2019 State of the Rhino



Rhinos have been in the news a lot this year, and we're glad to see them getting so much attention. After all, two of the world's five rhino species could easily be lost in our lifetime. Rhinos across the globe are threatened by rampant poaching to feed illegal markets, by habitat loss, and by other factors ranging from inbreeding to invasive species.

Ten years ago, fewer than 21,000 rhinos roamed the Earth. Today, rhino numbers hover around 27,300 – a 30 percent increase over the past decade. But, shorter-term, and especially over the past 2 years, the global rhino population has seen a steady decline, dropping from a high of 29,000 in 2017 to 27,300 today.

In Africa, poacher killed nearly 900 rhinos last year. While this is a decrease from 3.7 rhinos lost per day in 2015, 2018 still saw 2.4 rhinos killed per day – or one rhino every 10 hours. And this reduction in losses is only possible because of enormous protection efforts; without it, rhinos would be in far worse shape.

*When numbers from all five rhino species are combined, the total number of rhinos in the world has decreased over the last two years. Despite that, they have still increased 30% over the last decade*

**BUT IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM. RHINO CONSERVATION HAS SEEN SPECTACULAR SUCCESSES OVER THE YEARS.**

Thanks to strict protection by government authorities in India and Nepal, the greater one-horned, or Indian,



rhino has rebounded from fewer than 100 individuals to more than 3,600 today. And, beginning in 2009, IRF and our Indian Rhino Vision 2020 partners worked together to establish a new Indian rhino population in Assam's Manas National Park. Eighteen animals have been born in the park, and we've just recorded the second birth for 2019, which brings the population to 36 animals.

The Government of South Africa and dedicated conservationists teamed up to bring the southern white rhino back from fewer than 50 individuals in the early 1900s to roughly 18,000 today – though that population has declined over the past 2 years because of poaching. Unfortunately, white rhinos are seeing higher poaching levels than black rhinos, particularly in South Africa's Kruger National Park, largely because they generally live in more open habitats where they are easier to target. Sadly, from 2012 to 2017, the poaching scourge led to a 15% decrease in white rhino numbers.



Africa's other rhino species, the black rhino, is slowly coming back from horrendous losses. By 1993, fewer than 2,300 rhinos remained from populations of more than 65,000 in the 1970s. Today, black rhino numbers hover around 5,500 animals. They are also being hard-hit by poaching, but so far, are holding their own.



Moving to Indonesia, fewer than 80 Sumatran rhinos remain, and because it has declined more than 70 percent in the past 20 years, the species is likely the most endangered large mammal on Earth. Three small, isolated populations exist on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, plus a tiny handful of animals in Indonesian Borneo. Remaining populations are heavily guarded by anti-poaching units, but despite protection, numbers continue to decline. In 2018, the Government of Indonesia developed a Sumatran Rhino Emergency Action Plan, and in 2018, IRF and partners formed the Sumatran Rhino Rescue project, with plans to rescue rhinos and bring those with reproductive potential into large, semi-natural breeding and research facilities like the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary to increase population numbers.



Javan rhinos, numbering no more than 72 animals\* (\*Number updated from 68 as of 12\_06\_2019), are found only in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park, where they are heavily protected. There has been no poaching in Ujung Kulon in more than 25 years. Because of this, their population has been slowly but steadily increasing and IRF is working with local partner YABI to create even more suitable habitat for them, so their population can continue to grow.

## CITES 18TH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

On the international scene, In August, representatives from nearly every country in the world met in Geneva, Switzerland to discuss trade issues pertaining not only to charismatic species like rhinos and elephants, but also species ranging from otters to sturgeons to coral to a variety of plants. Three rhino proposals were brought to the parties: (1) by Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) to allow the country unrestricted international commercial trade in its specimens of white rhino, their horn and products. The Parties rejected the proposal 202-25, with seven abstentions; (2) by Namibia to allow the country to conduct live trade in southern white rhinos to appropriate destinations. The proposal was rejected 82-29; and (3) by South Africa to allow it to change its trophy hunting system for black rhinos, requesting the hunting quota be increased from five adult males to a total number of adult males not exceeding 0.5% of its total black rhino population. The Parties approved the proposal, with amendments.

## STRIDES IN ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assisted Reproductive Technology may, one day, play a vital role in securing the future for rhino populations. In September, European scientists recovered eggs from the last female (non-reproductive) northern white rhino females, and successfully fertilized them with frozen-thawed sperm from two deceased northern white rhino bulls. Two of the eggs grew to early stage embryos and have been frozen to be later implanted into a southern white rhino surrogate. This was followed by the recovery of one egg from the last Sumatran rhino in Sabah, Malaysia, just last week, which hopefully can be matured and frozen.

In July, US scientists produced a southern white rhino calf using frozen semen and artificial insemination (AI). And in May, another group of US scientists hormonally induced ovulation in a greater one-horned rhino and used AI to produce a calf.

We follow and applaud these developments with great interest, while also noting the importance of keeping these accomplishments in perspective, particularly for a subspecies that is functionally extinct, such as the northern white rhino. No species has ever been saved using ART alone, and attempting to use ART to try to 'bring back' any subspecies or species is a complex, highly difficult endeavor. These recent developments are but the first steps on a long, long journey.

There is no roadmap for ensuring the survival of rhino species, and there is more work than we can ever accomplish in our lifetime. However working together with our partners, we can achieve our goals. We applaud everyone's commitment to ensuring that all five rhino species survive for future generations. IRF takes the approach of maximizing options and minimizing regrets, tackling the challenges facing rhinos using multi-faceted strategies. For all five rhino species, the highest priorities are also the most basic: bolstering anti-poaching activities or "boots on the ground", maintaining intensive monitoring and active management of wild populations, and working with local communities. The problem, however, is no longer just about conservation. Some countries have elevated rhino crimes to the highest levels, commensurate with terrorism. As such, we also need to intensify international pressure on range country governments to enforce their wildlife crime laws and commitments to international treaties and foster more effective international collaboration on investigations to address the entire criminal supply chain, particularly in Asia.

[Visit IRF](#)

## Did you know the IRKA has a blog?!!

We have recently added a blog spot on our website.

**Stay up-to-date** with the latest news from all our members, including special births, professional development opportunities, workshop details and more.

**Sign up below to follow our blog!**

[BLOG](#)

## \*\*\*Changes in Membership\*\*\*

**We've made several changes to the IRKA membership enrollment!**

To streamline the process dues are owed just twice a year, **January or July**. You should have received an email in February stating your enrollment month. If you are unsure when you need to renew, please contact: [Membership](#)



[Visit our website](#)

[Correspondences](#)

**Births:**

Potter Park Zoo- Male black rhino "Jaali"  
North Carolina Zoo- 2 female white rhinos, "Mguu" and  
Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park- Female white rhino "Kayin"  
Folly Farm- Male black rhino  
Dublin Zoo- Male white rhino  
Lion Country Safari- Female white rhino "Elna"  
Denver Zoo- Female Greater one-horned rhino

**Deaths:**

White Oak- baby black rhino "Tidbit"

**Transfers:**

Phoniex Zoo received "Howard" a male white rhino from the Brevard Zoo  
San Diego Zoo Safari Park received "Kendi" a male black rhino from Cincinnati Zoo

**New Members**

Eric Flossic \_\_\_\_\_ Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum  
Erik Strojohann \_\_\_\_\_ Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum  
Joel Martin \_\_\_\_\_ Tulsa Zoo & Living Museum  
William Shackleton \_\_\_\_\_ Little Rock Zoo  
Elizabeth Abad \_\_\_\_\_ Ft. Worth Zoo  
Courtney Gordon \_\_\_\_\_ Lee Richardson Zoo  
Andrea Mueller \_\_\_\_\_ Riverbanks Zoo  
Stacy Strother \_\_\_\_\_ IRF  
Danielle Sumner \_\_\_\_\_ Zoo Atlanta  
Tabitha Miller \_\_\_\_\_ Zoo Miami  
Robert Krebs \_\_\_\_\_ Wildlife Safari  
Kinna Middleton \_\_\_\_\_ Sedgewick County Zoo  
Rebecca Heisler \_\_\_\_\_ St. Louis Zoo



**New/Renewing Conservation Partners**



San Diego Global \_\_\_\_\_ Platinum  
Buffalo Zoo \_\_\_\_\_ Gold

**Conservation Partners** are conservation organization or zoological institution which supports rhino conservation in accordance with the objectives and purpose of the IRKA. These partnerships often provide discounts for the supporting institution . It is important that as the IRKA grows we continue to garner the support from all facilities that are responsible for the protection and management of rhinoceros. We would like to extend our appreciation for the support from the following institutions, and hopefully we can add your zoo to this growing list! If you or your institution are interested in becoming a

Conservation Partner, please visit:

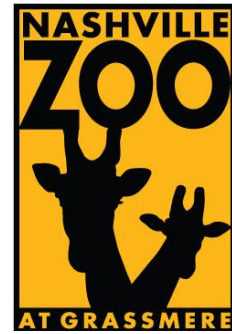
[Support IRKA](#)

**Platinum  
Conservation  
Partners**

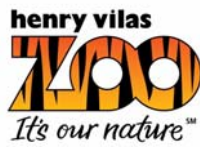




IRKA Partners



2019 Conservation Partners



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IRKA | C/O Busch Gardens-Sara Wunder, 3605 E . Bougainvillea Ave., Tampa , FL 33612

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