

# IN THIS ISSUE

## FEATURES

There Is One Meerkat Missing .....6  
*Frances Wood*

Covered with Sweat and Dust and It Isn't Even 9 A.M. ....12  
*Allan Kramer*

Island Conservation: A Biological Imperative .....18  
*Alan Lieberman, Cyndi Kuehler, Albert Varney, William Everett*

## DIRECT LINE

Feeling Sheepish .....4

## PARK PREMIERE

A Ripsnorting Good Time .....5

## NOOZNOTES

Cat Crazy! .....22

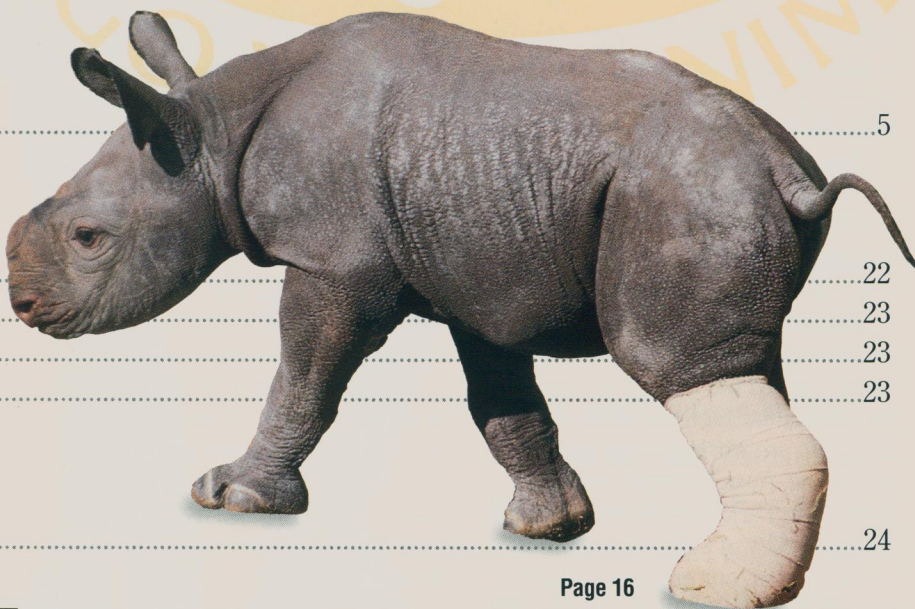
Beautiful and Bountiful .....23

Plant a Tree—Get in Free! .....23

Shop Talk .....23

## ON THE BOTANICAL SIDE

Nature's Perfect Marriage .....24



Page 16



## COVER

The highly social slender-tailed meerkat *Suricata suricatta hahni* always appears at the ready as it stands guard over its colony. These animals are native to Africa and live in large groups in underground burrows, where they dig out places for sleeping, hiding, and raising their young. San Diego Zoo photo by Ron Gordon Garrison.

Being a  
veterinarian at  
the Wild  
Animal Park  
can seem like  
working in the  
outback of  
Australia or  
the plains of  
East Africa  
because of the  
vast open  
exhibits.



# Covered

with

## sweat & dust

and it isn't even 9 a.m.

### Veterinary Rounds at the Wild Animal Park

By Allan Kramer ■ San Diego Zoo Photos by Ron Gordon Garrison

The morning sun has yet to burn away the night fog clinging to the valleys, and it is still cool as Dr. Jim Oosterhuis climbs aboard a Land Rover, starts the balky engine, and heads into the rolling brush country along a rutted, unpaved road.

It could be a scene from the arid backcountry of East Africa or Australia, but this is the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Oosterhuis, head of the Park's veterinary services, is off on another day of practicing veterinary medicine in "the wild."

As the Land Rover bumps along the road, it scatters rabbits, ground squirrels, and flocks of cattle egrets, local interlopers that have come to share the Park with its more exotic inhabitants. "We get some mule deer, too," Oosterhuis says.

Oosterhuis brings the Land Rover to a halt at the first stop on the morning rounds, a pen where a Przewalski's horse is corralled. The horse has developed a slight lameness. A decision was made to immobilize him and have his hooves trimmed, and, at the same time, the animal is examined to see if infection or injury has caused the lameness. Oosterhuis explains that once a year it's necessary to trim the hooves of the Park's Przewalski's horses and Hartmann's mountain zebras, whose hooves would have worn away had they been traveling long distances over hard ground in their native habitat.

For an observer, it's an important first lesson in the practice of veterinary medicine at the Wild Animal Park: it takes a lot of people to do the job. The first rule is to prevent a frightened animal from hurting itself, and the second is to ensure the safety of those caring for the animal. "It's when you don't have enough people that things go wrong," says Dr. Jeff Zuba, one of two other Park veterinarians on hand.

Przewalski's horses aren't noted for especially amiable dispositions, and this particular animal is known to act erratically when given immobilizing drugs. A dozen people are at the corral, making up a large part of the Wild Animal Park's veterinary staff. Among them is Dr. Jack Allen, another of the Park's veterinarians.

"All right, let's hurry up," Allen says to the assembled crew, once drugs immobilize the animal. Time is of the essence. Veterinarians don't want to keep the animal under the influence

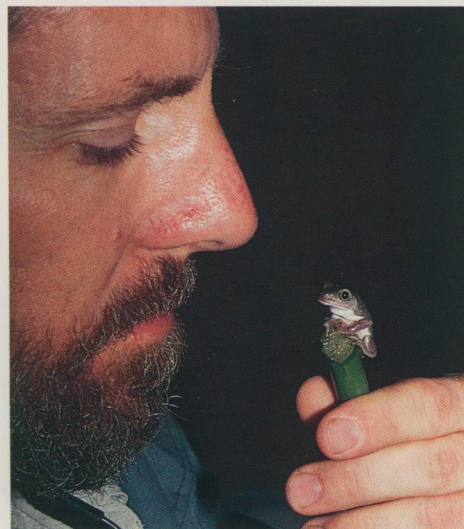




A regular part of Dr. Oosterhuis' job is darting and tranquilizing animals in the field so they can be examined and treated. Operating from a mobile medical lab, Oosterhuis selects the proper drugs when needed and consults with field keepers regarding an individual animal's needs.

over the ends of the horns. "Those horns could give you a nasty wound," a keeper says. "They could puncture your leg." The oryx has long and perfectly straight horns. Seen in profile, it is almost impossible to tell that an oryx has more than one horn, and some scholars believe it was the oryx that gave birth to the myth of the unicorn.

"It's desert animals like these that are the hardest to immobilize," Oosterhuis says. He explains that these animals have adapted over the millennia to survive in some of the world's harshest climates and most inhospitable terrains. As a result, they have become so hearty that they are able to put up a powerful struggle against effects of the drug.



The animals at the Park range from some of the world's largest to some of the smallest. Here, associate veterinarian Dr. Jack Allen examines a young Mexican tree frog.

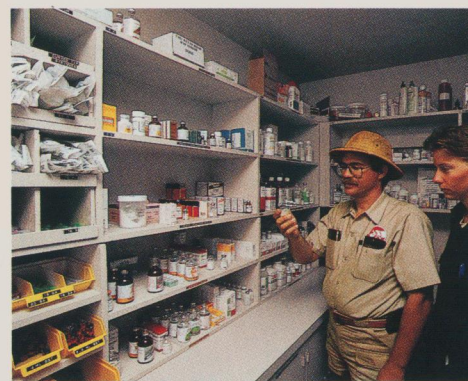


Seen at close range, the oryx is a creature of rare beauty. It has a marvelous coat that belies the harshness of its original habitat, where it rarely drinks water, subsisting only on the liquid found in the scant desert vegetation. After Zuba carefully examines the animal, it is sent on its way to a new home until head-butting season is over.

The next stop is what has become popularly known at the Wild Animal Park as the "condominiums." This is a complex of large flight cages that is home to California condors, one of the great success stories in the rescue of a highly endangered species, and one in which the Wild Animal Park has played a vital part.

Veterinarian Allen is examining Tecuya, an eight-year-old female. The California condor is an intelligent bird, and even though Tecuya has not been sedated, she remains calm as three helpers hold her while Allen scrubs a leg before drawing a blood sample. "You still have to be careful," Oosterhuis says. "One snap of that beak could severely damage a finger."

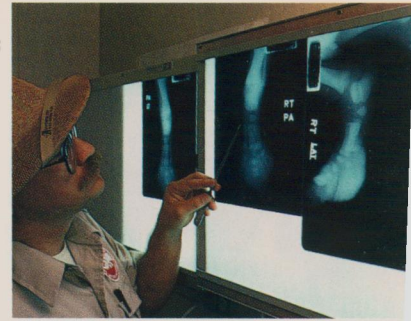
Because of the success of the condor captive-breeding program, Tecuya is being readied for a jet flight to another condor breeding program that has been



The Park's veterinary hospital maintains a variety of supplies and medicines, while well-equipped exam and operating rooms help veterinarians in caring for their animal patients. One of the unique features of the hospital is a plasma bank, holding blood plasma to give immunity to newborn animals rejected by their mothers.

started in Idaho. The purpose of the programs is to return California condors, one of North America's largest birds, with a magnificent 9½-foot wingspan, to carefully selected areas of the wild.

To get to the next stop on morning rounds, Oosterhuis drives across the Park. The two-way radio in the Land Rover crackles with conversations from voices with call signs like Elephant One and Mammal Three. At one point, a Dybowski's sika deer with an impressive set of velvet-covered antlers comes close



An infant rhino that suffered a broken leg was X-rayed, examined, and treated by Dr. Oosterhuis at the Park's hospital. After the calf wore a cast for a number of weeks, Oosterhuis immobilized the animal to remove it and then applied a temporary leg wrap. Keepers then returned the rhino to a holding area for further observation.



be monitored until the baby rhino's skin toughens up over a period of a few weeks.

Not all stops are happy ones. A Malaysian sambar, a member of the deer family, has just given birth and the infant is unable to stand. Keepers put in a call to the hospital. Zuba and Allen examine the infant as the mother watches warily from a distance. The infant's hooves are curled tightly under its legs. The veterinarians explain that sometimes it is possible to stretch the ligaments so the animal can stand. In this case, nothing can be done. Deer, like many animals that depend on their swiftness for survival, must be able to stand at birth and run shortly thereafter. In its native habitat, this animal would soon fall prey to predators or die of starvation because it could not nurse.

Zuba gives the animal a fatal but merciful shot. "Sorry about that guys," he tells the unhappy keepers. Oosterhuis explains that what has happened is part of the tragedy of a shrinking wildlife population. The genetic pool for some species has become so small that birth defects are occasionally seen.

Their rounds of the Park finished, the veterinary staff heads back to the hospital. On the long grade up what is known as hospital hill, the engine of the weary Land Rover conks out, and Oosterhuis coaxes the engine back to life.

The Wild Animal Park hospital is nothing much to look at. A modest group of low-lying, nondescript buildings that blend into the brush and that long ago became too small for the job to be done.

to sticking his head into the slow-moving Land Rover. At another spot, the road is blocked by a casually resting herd of Indian gaur, the world's largest wild cattle. "Come on, you guys, how about moving it?" Oosterhuis tells the herd. The gaur are in no hurry to leave but finally get up and amble slowly away. The last to go is a gigantic bull that moves as if aware of the dignity of his position.

The next stop is one almost for pure pleasure. Oosterhuis, Allen, and Zuba have all gathered to check in on one of the Park's newest arrivals, a two-day-old Indian rhino named Godavari, after a river in India. "Cute as a button," Zuba says as the baby trots alongside its mother. The new arrival had weighed in at 155 pounds after a 481-day gestation period, he adds. The veterinarians and keepers are carefully protecting the infant against sunburn. In its natural habitat, they explain, the baby would be protected from the sun by tall grass. At the Park, the time it spends outside a shelter will

A vitally important part of the hospital is the laboratory, presided over by farrier manager Susanne Schofield. She explains that one of the unique aspects of the hospital is the refrigerated plasma bank, holding blood plasma taken from donor animals who have recently given birth.

**To get** to the next stop on morning rounds, Oosterhuis drives across the Park. The two-way radio in the Land Rover crackles with conversation from voices with signs like Elephant and Mammal Threat.

This is vital for cases where injured animals must be hand raised at the Park's nurseries, such as instances where mothers reject infants. In such cases, natural immunity is passed from mother to child through the placenta. In other cases, however, the immunity must be provided mostly from mother's milk. In such cases, the plasma will be used to provide the infants with antibodies they need to

For Oosterhuis, Zuba, and Allen, morning rounds hold one last major project, an ongoing effort to save a wildebeest. The animal had torn ligaments in a foreleg. That resulted in a severe limp, and even in the protected environment of the Wild Animal Park, a severely disabled animal cannot survive long.

An orthopedic specialist had been called to the Park, and after an examination, it was decided to immobilize the 250-pound animal's leg in a full-length cast to give the ligaments a chance to heal. No ordinary cast would do, Oosterhuis explains. The wildebeest would demolish a plaster cast in a day. Instead, a cast was fashioned from the latest in resin casting materials.


Now, enough time has passed for the cast to be removed. After the wildebeest is rendered unconscious, it is taken from a holding pen at the hospital to the operating room, where Oosterhuis uses a cast-cutting saw to remove the cast and X-rays are taken. Then the animal is returned to its pen. The hospital staff will keep careful watch over the wildebeest. Only time will tell whether efforts to save the animal have been successful.

It is nearly noon. Only one more call remains on the morning rounds. It is to



check on a month-old lowland nyala—a member of the bovid family—being kept at the Park's infant isolation unit. Dr. Allen examines the frisky young animal. The morning is about to end on a happy note. The nyala is suffering from an umbilical hernia, and it turns out that a simple operation will cure the problem. Allen will perform the operation within the next few days, and soon the nyala will be back in the Park, frolicking with its family.

**An exam of an impala is performed by associate veterinarian Dr. Phil Ensley. A variety of stabilizing techniques are used to accomplish medical procedures quickly and with minimal trauma to the animal.**

While the San Diego Wild Animal Park is not the actual outback or a wild savanna, it provides enough daily drama and excitement by midday for the veterinary staff on their rounds. Each of them would say that it's a demanding—but always rewarding—career. 

## the vision of the future

The challenge of providing the very best of medical care for all of the Wild Animal Park's animals will be easier to meet in the near future. A new, multimillion-dollar Conservation Research and Veterinary Science Center is being conceived as part of the Park's long-range plan.

The Science Center will offer an improved hospital facility that will foster the advancement of modern animal care, as well as making possible valuable interaction and collaboration among the veterinary, curatorial, animal services, and research staffs.

The new hospital facility will have such things as expanded patient examination rooms, larger surgery rooms, physical therapy rooms, improved infant care rooms, larger laboratory rooms and storage, and intensive care suites. All of these expanded components have become essential over the years as the Park's col-

lection and resulting veterinary work load have grown since its opening in 1972.

Park veterinarians are responsible for the care of twice as many animals as the average zoo veterinarian. Each year, every veterinarian at the Park performs three times the number of anesthetic procedures as the average zoo veterinarian.



Also, the Park staff hand rears 13 times the number of mammal babies as the average zoo each year.

Along with the improved day-to-day care that will be provided by the new hospital, the Zoological Society's research department, its Center for Reproduction of Endangered Species (CRES), will also receive an expanded new home. Now recognized as a world leader in animal research, CRES scientists will be provided with the most up-to-date facilities in which to continue their valuable work on endangered and threatened species.

The Zoological Society is committed to providing the best care for its animals, and this new Science Center and hospital facility is an important and tangible expression of that vision.

To learn more about the project and how you can help, call Karen Amos at the San Diego Zoo at (619)685-3212.