

Member View

News, Ideas & Insights



Collaboration

Chicago Zoological Society and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Team Up to Help Save Rhinos

On World Rhino Day, 22 September 2016, the Chicago Zoological Society in Brookfield, Ill., helped to make a difference in putting an end to the smuggling of items made with rhino horn, which unlawfully enter and leave the United States. Recently, the Society, which manages Brookfield Zoo, teamed up with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Office of Law Enforcement by donating a small portion of a rhino horn that is being used to train one of the service dogs. With it, the dog will learn to sniff out items made from rhino horn.

"The Chicago Zoological Society is dedicated to the conservation of animals across the globe, including black rhinos," said Amy Roberts, curator of mammals for the Society. "Partnering with USFWS on this project is helping us fulfill our mission

as well as informing our guests about the plight of these magnificent creatures in the wild and how the import and export of their horns is affecting the wild population."

In addition to Chicago, these units—consisting of one dog and one handler—also operate in Los Angeles, Anchorage, Miami, Houston, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Currently, the dogs in the program are trained to detect the scent of products from five types of animals: elephants (specifically ivory), pythons, seahorses, sea turtles and rhinos.

Sadly, there is a need for the coverage. On an average day at O'Hare International Airport, the team of Amanda Dickson, wildlife inspector canine handler, and her partner, Lancer, will find items. Most of the

pieces are legal and are cleared. However, every week or two, an illegal item, which can be anything from a drink cup or a knife handle to a whole horn, is found. These are the results of poaching.

"It has been great to collaborate with the Chicago Zoological Society in obtaining the rhino horn," said Dickson. "This will allow us to have enough rhino horn for training purposes, and hopefully will make a difference in the illegal trade of these and other items."

Dickson said that, for the dogs, which are typically Labradors and often obtained from shelters and pounds from around the country, the program is more like a "game." They search luggage, packages and cargo behind the scenes, which keeps them mentally

Member View

stimulated and physically alert. Training is done using positive reinforcement—when Lancer performs a behavior correctly, he is rewarded with a treat.

The horn donated to USFWS was trimmed from one of Brookfield Zoo's rhinos. It is made of keratin (the same material as human fingernails), and grows constantly. If left sharp and untrimmed, the horn can obstruct the vision of a rhino or even injure another animal, especially during introductions between two animals. The procedure, which does not hurt the animal, is done occasionally and with the rhino's cooperation. In the wild, conservationists trim rhino horns so that poachers won't hunt the animals.

Items confiscated by USFWS are sometimes sent to schools, museums, or nature centers so they can be used for educational purposes. Other times, they are sent to the Service's repository or destroyed.



The black rhino is listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species™. The main reason the species is being decimated throughout its range in Africa is for their horns, which are used for medicinal purposes in Asia. According to the International Rhino Foundation, "The black rhino has suffered the most drastic decline in total number of all rhino species. Between 1970 and 1992, the population of this species decreased by 96 percent. In 1970, it was estimated that there were approximately 65,000 black rhinos in Africa, but by 1993, there were only 2,300 surviving in the wild. The black rhino population is recovering and increasing very slowly, but the poaching threat remains great." The current wild population is estimated to be just over 5,000 individuals.

Green Tales

Congratulations, Green Award Top Honor Winner

At the annual Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Conference in San Diego, Calif., Akron Zoological Park in Akron, Ohio, was awarded the AZA Green Award for their sustainable business operations initiatives. They "provide an opportunity for all staff to be active in conservation every day, both at home and at work," said Akron Zoo President and Chief Executive Officer, Douglas M Piekarz.

For over two decades, Akron's Green Team has pushed for sustainable business practices including alternative energy, waste reduction and innovative methods to manage storm water. Home to the first solar powered train in North America, Akron Zoo has saved over 259,000 pounds of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere in the past five years. Over 70 percent of the Zoo's lights have been converted to LED, including all of the parking lot security lights. For energy efficiency, Akron Zoo installed sixty-three 350-foot-deep heat wells, the first ground source heat pump of this size in the nation.

Acron Zoo's water management target was to reduce consumption by 50 percent, but the Zoo surpassed that goal to reduce their use by 79 percent since 2009. That is over 307 million gallons have been saved since the Zoo's sustainability initiatives began. Continuous improvements have been made, from fixing leaks throughout the park to the installation of a parking lot storm water catchment system that saves rain water from being discharged into the sewer system.

Since 2011, Akron Zoo has diverted millions pounds of organic waste from landfills, ensuring all sponsored events are zero-waste, and eliminating styrofoam and disposable plastic utensils. Going beyond traditional recycling, Zoo staff members



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commit to recycling electronics, light bulbs, tires, batteries and many other items that commonly end up in landfills. The Komodo Kingdom Café was the first 4-star green certified restaurant in a North American zoo in April 2012, with 100 percent diversion of all organic wastes. The Café also incorporates local food, vegetarian fare, and green cleaning agents, as well as providing guest education.

Acron Zoological Park continues to look towards the future, thinking about how both everyday decisions and large-scale projects can impact their carbon footprint. All future construction will be held to USGBC LEED-Silver standard or higher. The Zoo also continues to explore innovative waste management techniques, like a vegetable-wax ink for printing throughout the Zoo. The Green Team, with backing from the Zoo Board, sets and refines goals annually and recognizes that sustainability requires constant adjustment as new opportunities and technologies are developed.

Contributors: Douglas M Piekarz, president and chief executive officer; and Chris Norman, director of capital projects and sustainability, Akron Zoological Park.

If you have a sustainable story to share with Green Tales from your zoo or aquarium, please contact sophia.cifuentes@cincinnati-zoo.org