



# The Crash

## September 2023 "World Rhino Day!"

The IRKA newsletter: the leading network connecting rhino keepers.

### President's Perspective

Welcome to the Fall edition of the Crash! Wow, this will be my first perspective from the role of President. I follow in the footsteps of fantastic rhino professionals and people I am honored to call my friends.

First, I wanted to say a profound thank you to Joe Hauser for his dedication and passion for this organization. Since taking over the President's role in 2017, Joe has steadily progressed our organization to guide several projects, including our TERS program and two highly successful workshops! We cannot thank you enough, Joe, for your love and devotion to IRKA. Thankfully, he will continue to help guide and grow our organization through his continued efforts on the Board of Directors.

Another immense thank you goes to Chris Tubbs, our departing Treasurer extraordinaire! This role is not glamorous and often goes unnoticed, but it is essential in any organization. Chris has diligently performed this role, paying attention to the small details. During the years of his tenure, we have been able to grow our financial impact on our conservation projects. We thank you, Chris, for your guidance, professionalism, and sense of humor! Again, we are lucky to have Chris continue to assist with the growth of IRKA through his role on the BOD.

Thank you to all who participated in voting for the Board of Director positions this summer. This vote was the highest participation that we have had since we started this organization in 2006! We want to welcome the organization's newest BOD members, Amber Berndt and Chad Harmon. We look forward to having their passion and unique talents enhance our future goals and programs moving forward in the future.

Our Facility Focus highlights the Potawatomi Zoo in South Bend, Indiana. This 23-acre facility has never exhibited rhinos, but they are off to a great future. It's also exciting that their keepers attended the RKW in May and have made some changes based on information learned at the workshop!

Many of us have been following the development of the auction of John Hume's Platinum Rhino facility. We have included an update on the sale of this property to African Parks and the hopeful future of rhinos in Africa. World Rhino Day is very close! This year, we have decided to offer two options in participating to save Sumatran Rhinos! First is the reforestation project in Way Kambas National Forest. This project directly affects the backup food source for Sumatran rhinos. A tree will be planted for every dollar donated to help that food source. Our other fundraiser this year is through Rack and Plume. We will receive 15% of all purchases from Sept. 20 -27th. They have made a one-of-a-kind Sumatran rhino ornament that is amazing!!! Please help us get the word out by reposting our social media links to these fundraising initiatives



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## B.O.D. Election Results



**5 seats were open for the 2023 Board of Directors' election, with two new positions created to help curate the expanding content offered by IRKA.**

### CONGRATULATIONS

to **Joe Hauser, Chris Tubbs, and Jason Faessler** for their re-election to BOD.

### WELCOME

to **Amber Berndt** and **Chad Harmon** joining the team.

**New terms began September 1st, 2023 and will serve for 3 years.**



**Amber Berndt** is a Senior Keeper in the Plains Department at the Indianapolis Zoo. She has worked with Southern white rhinos and other African species for over 18 years. Amber became a member of IRKA in 2005 and was on the Board of Directors in 2017. She is currently on the scholarship and fundraising committees. She is the Chair for Indy AAZK's Bowling for Rhinos and has had the opportunity to visit Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and Ol' Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya. She will have another once in a lifetime opportunity of visiting Java and Sumatra next summer.

As a member of IRKA for over ten years, **Chad Harmon** is now the Africa Area Supervisor at the Oregon Zoo and has worked with both African and Asian rhinos, 19 of his 25 years in the animal care field. His career has brought him to both coasts of the US managing Southern black rhinos at Disney's Animal Kingdom and then as a primary rhino keeper at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle when he received their first rhinos in the zoo's 124-year history before making his way to Portland. Chad has a vested interest in how we can provide better care for the rhinos in our collections, such as large volume phlebotomy and minimizing Iron Overload Disorder (IOD) in captive browsing rhinos, and Chronic Foot Disease (CFD) in captive Greater One-horned rhinos including changing to the appropriate substrate for better welfare. He's been fortunate to speak at schools, live streamed social media, art and conservation events about The Horns and Heroes Project a non-profit organization he started and raised funds for The International Rhino Foundation and rhino conservation and consulted with other institutions about future rhino exhibit design, care, and welfare.



He currently shares his time between Seattle and Portland with his wife, two dogs and cat and claims to be the world's biggest Pearl Jam fan. When not working with rhino he can be found working on his many art projects, travelling, collecting vinyl records & tattoos, and watching movies. He also has an infinity for so-called useless information and hopes to someday be as cool as Joe Hauser.

**In addition, the executive team terms of service were also up for renewal.**

**Chris Bobko**, from The Rhinory, will serve as **President**

**Cassandra Kutelik**, from Lincoln Park Zoo, will serve as **Vice President**

**Robyn Lorsch**, from Disney's Animal Kingdom, will serve as **Secretary**

**Cody Cseplo**, from The Wilds, will serve as **Treasurer**

**Facility Focus:**  
**Potawatomi Zoo**

The Potawatomi Zoo in South Bend, Indiana is currently a holding facility for 1.0 seven year old Southern White Rhino, Masamba. As a small 23 acre zoo, our rhino program was brand new upon his arrival in the fall of 2019 being that the Potawatomi Zoo had never housed rhinos of any species before.



Our rhino holding area was converted from an old camel exhibit and stalls, into his current setup. Masamba has two stalls, each 320 sq ft, connected via a chute. These stalls are at the back of one of our hoofstock barns so he does share a barn with various hoofstock and bird species. Off his barn he has a holding yard (1300 sq ft), and then a 50ft chute that goes from the holding yard to his habitat, which contains his in-ground scale. His habitat is about 16,000 sq ft, and is graded down so it is sloped. His exhibit contains a large wallow with a hose and mister system that is directed into the wallow, various rock work, deadfall, scratch post, and trees. He has a concrete pad that his hay is typically placed on, and mats that we will put hay/grain on as well.

At the front of his exhibit is an encounter space where Masamba voluntarily participates in weekly paid encounters with guests as well as donor encounters. Keepers perform these encounters and use them as an opportunity to educate the public on rhinos and how people can aid the conservation efforts to support them. These encounters are typically around 20-30 minutes with a maximum of 6 people. Masamba lines up parallel to the bars and allows people to rub him all over. The encounters are always voluntary for him, although he has never passed up the opportunity for scratches and attention! We started these encounters with him in 2021 and they have been a huge hit with both our community and Masamba!



We also occasionally do training demonstrations at this encounter area where guests can see a few of his behaviors. Masamba does get cracks in his toe nails so we also use this area to perform minor foot work as he will lay down at the front and allow for easier access to his feet than we have in the barn.

Most of his training is performed inside the barn in the small chute between his stalls due to his outdoor holding space being very exposed to a lot of activity. We do not have a chute big enough to lock him in, so we will shut one of the chute doors so he is blocked on three sides as needed. Another struggle we have with his set up, is that our bars inside his barn are diagonal with cross sections of bars on his chute (pictured below). This does make it difficult to safely access him for things like blood draw behaviors.

This along with the common White Rhino problem of them not being very food motivated, has made the progression of his training slower than we would have liked. Masamba has never showed any interest in novel food items, so his biggest reward for participating in training has always been tactile reinforcement in the form of a scrub brush. We will also use his grain (Mazuri Grain-free hay enhancer) and alfalfa hay mix as secondary reinforcers.



Masamba did, however, successfully participate in the AIRS study. We have been able to draw blood from his ears, as well hand inject any necessary vaccines. He can be very needle sensitive, so we have had the most success after using Lidocaine cream prior to attempting a blood draw.

After attending the rhino conference and listening to everyone's amazing presentations, we also submitted a husbandry change proposal to dig up a lot of our rhino concrete and limestone substrate to put in the large wood chips! We are hoping that the addition of the deep wood chips will help with the

cracking of his toenails. This proposal was approved, and work should be beginning to make those changes soon!



**Kara Close & Lauren Huber**  
Potawatomi Zoo

IT IS BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

## 2023 World Rhino Day



### **Help IRKA for World Rhino Day by supporting the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary Restoration Project**

Clearing of invasive tree species allows for the planting of new trees in order to have a back-up source for natural vegetation for rhinos and elephants due to potential wildfires. For every dollar you donate, a tree will be planted. This project has helped form relationships with the local community by employing farmers and disabled men to support their families financially. The women of the farmers have also been given the opportunity to acquire income and gain skill sets for their livelihood. Professional consultants train the women how to do eco-printing and they use this technique to make scarves. The best part of this project is that it's a part of the restoration project. This is because they can use the leftover browse from the Sumatran rhinos to make the designs on each scarf.

**IRKA was fortunate enough to get 10 of these priceless scarves that were handmade in Sumatra. For each donation made via the tree planting tabs on the**



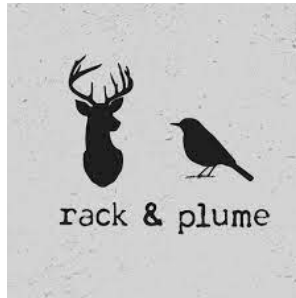
website, a certain amount of tickets will be given for your chance to win one of these scarves in our raffle.

[Buy Tickets](#)

## Rack and Plume Special!

In addition to these incredible scarves for raffle, Rack and Plume, is offering to donate 15% of all purchases from September 20-27 to IRKA.

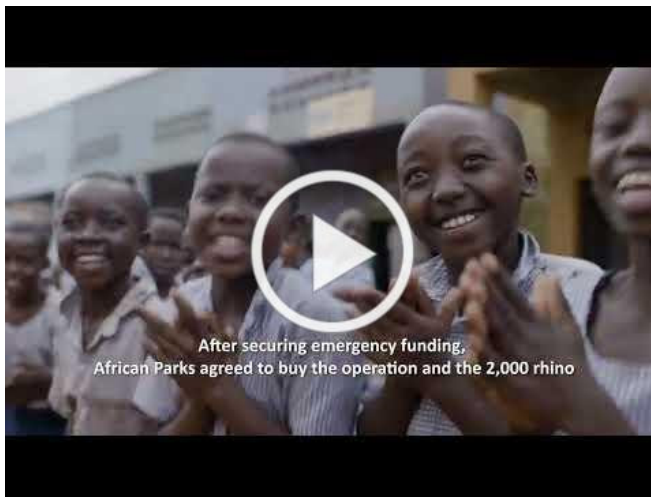
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## A Hopeful Outcome for 2,000 White Rhinos

*\*Repost of I.R.F. blog*

Earlier this month, African Parks, a nonprofit conservation organization working in 12 countries across Africa, announced their acquisition of 2,000 white rhinos formerly owned by John Hume under the 'Platinum Rhino Project.' African Parks plans on rewilding these rhinos over the next 10 years to some of the 22 protected areas they manage as well as work with partners to identify additional translocation sites. Their video below provides more on their vision for these rhinos and the impacts this plan will have on Africa and the rest of the world.



The International Rhino Foundation is highly encouraged that African Parks and their funders have negotiated such a promising arrangement for these 2,000 rhinos. This plan prioritizes multinational conservation for restocking and repatriation of white rhinos throughout Africa, bolsters the global population and will increase the genetic diversity and long-term vigor of this species.

It is no easy feat to move one rhino, let alone 300, per year but it's a commendable goal and we're grateful to African Parks for negotiating this outcome. IRF looks forward to this next chapter in Africa's rhino conservation efforts and supporting these initiatives to see black and white rhinos thrive in the wild.



## IRKA Merchandise

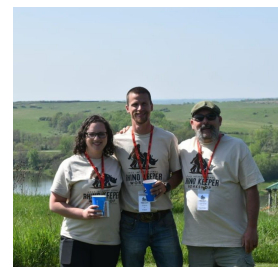


Do you want to support  
IRKA?

Need a new hat?  
A decal on your water bottle?  
Enjoy bigfoot conservation?

Check out the new merchandise  
available in limited quantities at our  
website

[rhinokeeperassociation.org](http://rhinokeeperassociation.org)



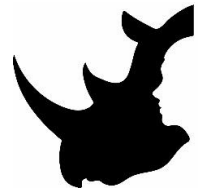


The volunteer committee would like to thank all the amazing volunteers who have come forward to get involved and helped the IRKA since the committee's inception. Thanks to their help, we are making strides in improving social media experiences and keeping the website relevant with the latest information and content. We are also continuing our volunteer partnership with the International Rhino Foundation, providing research on special projects.

**The volunteer committee met in early June and identified a number of projects and ideas that could be implemented moving forward. Two of those projects we would like to concentrate on now are conservation messaging, and creating a keeper encounter encyclopedia.**

Keeper encounters have become one of the most effective tools for connecting and educating zoo visitors. For the majority, it has been woven into our daily routine. Every keeper has their own unique delivery and content they rely on entering any encounter. The checklist of concrete facts and talking points, anecdotal personal experiences, and the fun facts that make people love rhinos! The IRKA would like to capitalize on the vast knowledge and individuality of our membership to create a comprehensive collection of experiences, talking points and fun facts. We feel that once complete, this information could be a valuable resource for all keepers to enhance their ability to connect with people at every encounter.

Proper conservation messaging is vital to the survival of all five species of rhino. It is the IRKA's duty to ensure we are able to provide members the most accurate, beneficial and up to date information. We believe it is valuable to have access to the information available to speak on the conservation efforts going on for all five species. It is our goal to have volunteers research and compile the latest information on conservation efforts going on for both African and Asian rhinos.



**Anyone interested in volunteering to research, compile and organize the information for either of these projects for the IRKA should contact:**

Jason Faessler at [jfaessler@nashvillezoo.org](mailto:jfaessler@nashvillezoo.org) or Jade Tuttle at [jade.tuttle@nczoo.org](mailto:jade.tuttle@nczoo.org).

We can always use content for our social media sites, anyone interested in helping out that way can contact Pat Fountain at [pfountain@ingham.org](mailto:pfountain@ingham.org).

**Other volunteer opportunities include:**

[IRKA Correspondences](#)

[Webinar content curation](#)

[Rhino Dentition research/content](#)

[Rhino Husbandry Manual review](#)

### **Rhino Research Review:**

*Reduction in home-range size and social interactions among dehorned black rhinoceroses (*Diceros bicornis*)*

Dehorning is a common practice aimed at reducing poaching of wild or semi-wild rhinos. However, little is known about the potential implications of dehorning on rhino ecology and behavior, particularly in *in situ* environments. In their paper, Duthe et al., attempt to quantify the impacts of dehorning of black rhinos by evaluating more than 15 years of monitoring data across 10 South African game reserves. Their study, which analyzed >24,000 sightings of 368 individual rhinos, focused on mortality, space use and social interactions and was recently published in the [Proceedings of the Nation Academy of Sciences](#).

When looking specifically at mortalities, the authors observed a decrease in poaching mortalities once dehorning was widely implemented. However, they are careful to note that during the same period an overall increase in other anti-poaching efforts also occurred and are careful not to attribute lower poaching mortality solely to the dehorning process. They also observed a decline in natural deaths during the same time. They therefore conclude

that while dehorning may or may not reduce poaching mortalities, it does not result in an increase in natural mortalities.

Dehorning was shown to have an effect on black rhino behavior and ecology. Specifically, home ranges of both male and female rhinos shrank significantly following dehorning. For females, home ranges were reduced by approximately 50%, while males showed a nearly 40% reduction in home territories. For social interactions, the study focused on three black rhino populations (Ithala, Manyoni and Phinda) and for each, a decrease in social interactions was observed. Rhinos in all three populations exhibited fewer social interactions, with Manyoni and Phinda having the greatest reduction and Ithala showing a weaker reduction. Interestingly, the Ithala population was the most recently dehorned at the time of the study, prompting the authors to suggest that the magnitude of dehorning-associated reductions in social interactions may be time dependent. They also note that male-male interactions were most affected by dehorning.

This study raises several interesting points and questions for consideration. First, dehorning does not appear to contribute to black rhino mortality. Whether it is an effective deterrent of poaching remains unclear and needs to be studied further. Second, do reduced home ranges and social interactions have unforeseen population-level consequences? Will this result in increased isolation of individuals and have a negative effect on breeding and gene flow within these groups? How will reduced home ranges affect black rhino dispersal across the larger landscape? Conversely, can reduced ranges and social interactions have a positive outcome on black rhino populations by reducing mortalities associated with negative social interactions? Does dehorning and the associated range reduction mean that more rhinos could co-exist within a particular population than would be possible if rhinos had horns? The answers to these questions are likely complex and not straightforward and provide excellent opportunity for future research.

### Reference

Duthé V, Odendaal K, Van der Westhuizen R, et al. Reductions in home-range size and social interactions among dehorned black rhinoceroses (*Diceros bicornis*). *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2023;120(25):e2301727120. doi:10.1073/pnas.2301727120

### New Members

Michelle Peck ----- Cleveland Metroparks  
Amanda Kile ----- St. Louis Zoo



**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](#)



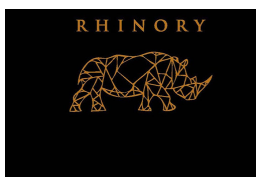
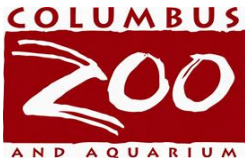




IRKA Partners



## 2023 Conservation Partners





### Conservation Sponsors



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