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The American Association of Zoo Keepers
San Diego Chapter
Quarterly Newsletter—Fall 2009

Message from the President

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

The last few months have been especially busy and exciting due to planning for two big events—Bowling For Professional Excellence and National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW).

Our annual bowling event this year had a different fundraising focus than in past years—it was dedicated to AAZK's 2011 conference which we will host. Just like our yearly Bowling For Rhinos event, participants were invited to bowl, partake in raffles and a silent auction, and assist our chapter in raising funds. Most of the funds are allocated to the conference so that keepers and conference attendees can enjoy the event at an affordable price. We also donated 10% of the proceeds to rhino conservation.

Our winner for the last several years and again this year was Nicki Boyd, Animal Care Manager at the Zoo. She is always the person to beat when it comes to fundraising!

Next up was the third annual NZKW, celebrated July 19–25. San Diego AAZK's board members and keepers played a key role in the preparations for this important event. Activities included several get-togethers, a special tribute to keepers at the Padres game, Zoolympics, and sharing information with guests at the Zoo and Wild Animal Park. It was truly a full schedule, but tremendous fun!

Stay tuned to our web site for more details about these activities and accompanying pictures.

I am always proud to discuss with the public what we do as keepers. Look how far zoo keeping has come! Keepers are involved in training, conservation, enrichment, education, research, wildlife projects, and so much more. And to top it off, we love our jobs! We are lucky to have a job in a field that we love, plus it's a field that is constantly growing in its relationship with conservation.

Thank you to all the keepers and animal care staff at the San Diego Zoo, Wild Animal Park, SeaWorld, California Wolf Center, Chula Vista Nature Center, and Living Desert who shared the weeks' events that made this NZKW special and amazing.

Thanks for everything you do!

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Bowling For Professional Excellence (BFPE)

by Kym Nelson, WAP Mammal Keeper

Thank you to everyone who participated and supported their local AAZK chapter in this fun-filled event! This year's fundraiser was held at Kearny Mesa Bowl in San Diego. It was a high energy, prize packed, three hours of bowling with friends and coworkers! Click [here](#) to see pictures from the event.

We had some great raffle prizes including gift certificates to local restaurants, four Hornblower harbor cruises, and of course extra days of annual leave for society employees!

There were some amazing deals to be found at the Silent Auction as well. Participants bid on hotel stays, spa treatments, original artwork, animal artifacts and an autographed Chargers jersey (just to name a few)!

All that bowling and beer, caused some bowlers and spectators to crave something sweet to eat. No worries there since AAZK had a variety of snacks and baked goods for sale at unbelievably low prices. In addition to all of this, we also were treated to a free massage (donations to SD AAZK were accepted) courtesy of [Ron Arbel](#).

We would like to thank all of our generous sponsors for this event: Sheraton Hotel and Marina, Westin Gaslamp Quarter, San Diego Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Walter Todd salon, World Famous, Café on Park, Islands Fine Burgers on Balboa, Chili's in Clairemont, Hornblower Cruises and Events, Zoological Society of San Diego, TGI Fridays Carmel Mountain, Hooters Mission Valley, Marie Callender's Carmel Mountain, and XXX of Mary Kay. Without your support this event would not have been possible!

Our inaugural BFPE event raised almost \$4,000. Thank you everyone for your support!

I would like to make a special mention to Nikki Boyd, who once again raised the most money this year. \$400 will be donated to rhinos' conservation.

There has been a lot of confusion over SD AAZK's renaming our traditional "Bowling For Rhinos" (BFR) event to "Bowling For Professional Excellence." I would like to take this opportunity to explain our decision and the international impact that San Diego is going to have on rhino conservation in the future.

AAZK's combined international efforts have raised over \$3 million through BFR since its inception in 1990! In fact, our San Diego chapter has raised almost \$150,000. None of this would have been possible without your support and we need that now more than ever!

National AAZK depends on the annual conference held each year to generate the funds needed to keep the organization in operation. It costs money to provide scholarships, prizes, publications, and communications.

Our chapter was asked to host the 2011 National Conference. AAZK is depending on us to make this conference a success. Without our support, the future of all BFR events could be in jeopardy!

The downside of hosting a conference is that our chapter takes responsibility for covering several up-front costs that will be reimbursed in 2011 and then can be charitably distributed.

In summary, our situation can be simplified with this basic explanation.

San Diego Conference = AAZK = BFR

Without one, the next cannot occur.

Last year's BFR generated a grand total of \$273,279 (more than \$14,000 came from our chapter)! How much money can you raise?

Finally, I would like to thank all SD AAZK members for their support and we look forward to seeing you at upcoming events!

A brain freeze benefit

by Matthew Akel, SD AAZK Vice President

On Tuesday, May 28, AAZK's San Diego Chapter held a fundraiser to support the 2011 National AAZK Conference in San Diego. This event was held at Jamba Juice located in Hillcrest on Robinson Avenue.

In preparation for this fundraiser, a fellow board member (who shall remain nameless here) and I went there on the evening of May 27 and plastered the store with AAZK information for guests (as a subtle way to suggest supporting our fundraiser).

More than 45 people attended this event! With the support of Jamba Juice, our chapter received 20% (\$53) of the total money (\$260) raised from AAZK supporters who visited that location.

Thanks to everyone who went in to help our chapter. Note that we are not responsible for any permanent damage due to brain freezes.



Cheetah Conservation Fund Internship

by Kym Nelson, WAP Mammal Keeper

Thanks to a continuing education grant and a leave from my regular job as a keeper, I went to Namibia in March 2009 for a one-month internship with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF). This organization was founded in 1990 by Dr. Laurie Marker (last year's recipient of the Zoological Society of San Diego's conservation medal). CCF is home to 49 cheetahs most of whom came to CCF as orphaned cubs and are non-releasable because they never had the chance to learn how to hunt.

During my stay at CCF, I learned first-hand about the challenges of conservation for wild populations. I was invited to sit in on a meeting between local conservation organizations, government officials, and agricultural union representatives discussing the plight of the cheetah and all of Namibia's carnivores. This meeting dealt with the best interests of wildlife plus human socio-economic issues and legislation. It really opened my eyes to the diversity and depth of the human/wildlife issue and how hard conservationists have to work in the field to get things done!

CCF concentrates on educating visitors about the plight of cheetahs and educates farmers and local communities. As you might expect, they offer courses highlighting the importance of wildlife and educating the farmers on conservation and alternatives to shooting "problem" animals. They help farmers learn to identify predators by bite marks and their locations, develop more sustainable farmer practices, and improve their animal husbandry techniques.

In addition, CCF offers classes you might not expect...like auto mechanics! I met with several farmers who were attending these weeklong courses and was amazed at how some of their views on wildlife had changed over the course of their time at CCF.

This conservation organization participates with others worldwide, conducting and helping with research ranging from genetics to habitat use and analysis. One of our daily duties was to collect cheetah scat from all the pens and also pick up any we found from wild cats. The samples were used in various genetic and hormonal studies.

Finding wild cheetahs' scat can be remarkably difficult! These animals do not always choose to poop in the most obvious places. CCF is working with 2 dogs that are being trained to search off the beaten path for cheetah scat. I was tasked with teaching the principles of operant conditioning and the power of positive reinforcement some of CCF's staff members.

While I learned so much in my time there, my main focus was caring for the captive cats. If you think you are overworked, then try working at CCF! There were only two keepers to look after all 49 cats and they were housed in large pens located up to a 45-minute drive away from the main centre. I was there during the annual examinations, so we started boxing cats at 6:45 a.m. and didn't release the last cat of the day until 7 p.m.! It took two weeks, working seven days a week, to finish all of the cats with an average of four examinations per day. Man, was I ready to get back to my grueling eight hours at the WAP! I helped CCF's keepers learn some tricks of the trade and gave them some much needed time off!

Namibia was amazing, I saw beautiful animals everywhere I went, and have already begun planning a return trip!



New, state-of-the-art digs for elephants

by Tina Hunter, WAP Mammal Keeper

Elephant Odyssey (EO) is the Zoo's new exhibit that opened in May 2009 as an ode to California animals past and present. With the typical gift shop, grub spot (I heard it's actually pretty good food), and—oh yah—animal exhibits, EO uniquely incorporates replicas of many extinct creatures including the saber toothed cat, giant sloth, and a mastodon of some sort. This exhibit also boasts an archeological dig and interactive, educational exhibits.

Eight mammal species which include guanacos and pronghorns, several bird species including California condors (now on public display at the Zoo for the first time), insects, and reptiles all reside in this huge series of enclosures. The WAP's very own Asian elephants, two lions, California condors, and a secretary bird made the move to the cooler, coastal climate. When I saw how well the lions and condors have adjusted to the crowds, it's hard to believe that these animals hardly had any visitors for the last few years.

The centerpiece of this new exhibit is the metal maze of an elephant barn. The keepers who work there practically need a degree in Physics to operate the 38 hydraulic doors in this facility. All doors are coded and they have a big remote to control the whole operation. In addition, the keepers still need to care for their animals' needs (i.e., feeding, cleaning, and foot care) plus participate in numerous public interactions. It's a big job!

Something that was really over the top...they have hot water throughout and through all hoses. What? No kidding, good for them.

Also included in this state-of-the-art heart of EO—a laundry room, a large kitchen with two refrigerators, a keeper room with computers, locker room/showers, and of course the one thing that many keepers wish they had near their areas—the ever important restrooms.

A sizable portion of EO is a huge yard (upwards or about 2.5 acres) that has a gate about half way which can divide the yard in two. This is a key feature because the Zoo's and WAP's herds still are separated at this point. There is a recirculating pool the size of many whole animal exhibits in the older part of the Zoo, sunken trees, and rough surfaced walls for scratching that itch. But perhaps the coolest feature of EO, in this keeper's opinion, is the utilitrees.

Each utilitree has a hay dispenser in the bottom, remote pulleys for hanging enrichment toys and browse, heaters and misters, and to "top" it all off, greenery planted on top to eventually grow over the edges to resemble a tree. Genius, if it actually works.

Though this shiny, new toy would be the envy of keepers worldwide, it is not without flaws. Everything in the elephant area of EO is big...which means big maintenance. All seven members of the elephant herd are over 40, thus requiring a little more care than a younger group. This translates into labor shortages, multiple shifts, and a vacation calendar from hell.

With all this jealousy swirling around about the novelty of it all, I was more than a little pleased to hear that, even here, drains were placed in the wrong part of the rooms or not there at all. In addition, the facility has its share of blind corners, a couple of doors that seem to swing the wrong way, and brand spankin' new things are already broken. Ah, the life of a keeper.



Swap Meet fundraiser

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK

It looked like rain the morning of May 2, 2009. The previous night's weather report said there would be a 50-50 chance of rain.

We were lucky—the rain stayed away for our bi-annual swap meet fundraiser. However, the soggy forecast did keep the crowds low.

We unloaded our donated goods by 6:30 a.m. and were ready to start raising money for the 2011 AAZK Conference in San Diego.

Thanks to the selling abilities of Laurie Brogan, Bob Cisneros, Aimee Goldcamp, and Cammy Muirhead, with help from Cammy's four-legged friend Stella, plus some yummy donuts, we did our best to draw in the few people who walked by.

Considering that we had fewer items than in the past, that the weather was a bit cool, and that the crowd was thin, we did remarkably well. We raised over \$300 that will go toward conference expenses.

Thank you to everyone who donated items and supported our efforts—we couldn't do it without you.

If you'd like take part in one of our swap meet fundraisers, let us know. We'd love to have you join us!

AAZK update

by Bob Cisneros, AAZK Board of Directors

The 2009 ICZ-AAZK conference in Seattle is in its final stages of preparation. If you submitted a paper or poster, you should have received a notification stating whether or not it was accepted.

The AAZK Professional Development Committee will be sponsoring two workshops at the conference—"Body Condition Scoring," and "Capture and Restraint." The Conservation Committee will be sponsoring a workshop on common issues of the bushmeat crisis.

AAZK has been working hard to update its web page. Hopefully, the new changes will make it easier to navigate. Many elements have been moved to the Members Only page. If you have not signed up for the Members Only page yet, you are missing out on a lot of information that is only available to AAZK members. Thanks to AAZK Board Member Denise Wagner for all of her hard work in updating the pages. Take a look when you get the chance—www.aazk.org.

As some of you already know, I recently returned from a trip to Indonesia where I assessed the Rhino Protection Unit Programs there for AAZK. Each year, AAZK raises over \$300,000 for rhino conservation through its national Bowling For Rhinos fundraising efforts. A portion of those funds is directed to Indonesian rhino conservation through the International Rhino Foundation. Specifically, those funds help support the Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) in Java and Sumatra. I was fortunate to spend time with RPUs at three different base camps. Their commitment to conservation and dedication to protecting the rhinos from poachers is impressive.

Looking forward to 2011

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK

As many of you already know—I do think we’ve announced it a couple of times—SD AAZK was selected to host the 2011 National AAZK Conference. The dates have been picked (September 24–28), and the location has been chosen (the Westin Gaslamp), but there is still so much to do.

We’re excited to be hosting the conference, but at the same time we’re scared and nervous. I mean, there’s a lot that goes into putting together an event that will have 300 expected attendees. It’s not just choosing the location and dates, but putting together the program which includes speakers, workshops, outings, etc. And then there’s that little voice you hear over and over... “you’re going to need to raise more money than that.” To me, that’s the nerve racking part.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m very excited about the conference; I’ve always loved putting events together. But this is a conference in San Diego hosted by the San Diego chapter of AAZK, the chapter that started the whole AAZK organization! My joke in the beginning was we’re going to have to be the China of the Olympics. It’s just going to have to be that good. We want this conference to be educational, yet fun; exciting, yet affordable. Then that little voice in the background starts up again.

So when SD AAZK’s board began a to do list for the conference, we each had many expectations that we each hoped to fulfill. I’m sure that list will keep growing as we work on the details. And there are many details.

Luckily I learned early on that there is a very handy organization in San Diego that helps putting something like a conference together...for free. That’s my favorite price! This organization is called the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau. Their goal is for organizations to have conferences or other large events in San Diego, and they will help make it happen. So I called and hooked up with Gillian Ware, one of the national sales managers.

Gillian was great. We told her what we were looking for and she sent the info to all hotels in San Diego and each one responded to me to let me know if they could meet our requirements or not.

So now you’re asking, what were our requirements? We had several but some of the key selling points included: \$150 range for room rate, access to public transportation, general session and workshop breakout spaces, reasonable catering prices, and exceptional customer service.

Sixteen hotels responded. After reviewing each one’s proposal (and I do mean review each and every little detail), we visited seven hotels—Hilton San Diego Resort, The Catamaran, Omni San Diego Hotel, Town & Country, Westin Downtown, Sheraton Marina, and Westin Gaslamp. They were all amazing. We spent a minimum of 1.5 hours at each hotel, making for some very long days. We saw everything from guest rooms, conference areas, on-site restaurants, and we met staff from each location. The day we visited the Sheraton, the staff brought in their pets; the day we visited the Westin Gaslamp, the staff wore safari outfits and animal masks; the Town & Country fed us and gave us our choice of conference spaces. I mean we were really courted. This made it much harder to make our final decision. But we had to sit down and weigh the pros and cons of each and every one of the locations.

In the end, we chose the Westin Gaslamp Hotel, located by Horton Plaza. Why? Well for several reason really. Hillary Kay is our Westin Gaslamp contact and she is the Sales Manager we worked with. Each time we went, she and her staff were outstanding. We wanted to make sure that our attendees would feel special and have the best experience possible, and we believe that the Westin Gaslamp could provide that. That plus the \$159 room rate, the reasonable food and beverage minimum, the beautiful rooms and elegant conference spaces, and the many amenities they have included into the contract. The location doesn’t hurt either. It’s located in downtown San Diego one block from the # 7 bus that takes you directly to the Zoo in 15 minutes, and within walking distance to restaurants and nightlife where attendees will be able to unwind after a day of educational presentations and workshops.

After we signed the contract, neither Hillary nor Gillian disappeared. They still keep in touch, following up on details for the conference. That seems like a very good sign to me.

So that’s how we selected our location for the 2011 conference. Now that that is done with, we are working on the other details. Did I mention there are many details? I’m sure I’ll be telling you more about them.

Meanwhile, check out our hotel. Yes, **our** hotel—SD AAZK’s hotel for the 2011 conference. I’m sure you’ll agree with us, it was the right choice. <http://www.westingaslamp.com/>

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The Keeper is published quarterly by the San Diego Chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers, Inc. (SD AAZK), a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization with offices at P.O. Box 120551, San Diego, CA 92112; (619) 231-1515, ext. 4672. Address for editorial, advertising and membership inquiries—SD AAZK, P.O. Box 632984, Hillcrest Post Office San Diego, CA 92103. Reproduction or use without written permission of editorial or

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CALENDAR

LOCAL EVENTS

Stay tuned to our [events web page](#).

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Sept. 2, 2009 Third Orangutan SSP Husbandry Workshop—Zoo Atlanta. For more info email theitz@zooatlanta.org

Sept. 24–29, 2009 Joint 36th AAZK & 3rd International Congress on Zoo Keeping—Seattle, WA, hosted by Woodland Park Zoo and Puget Sound AAZK Chapter. Info at www.pugetsoundaazk.org

Nov. 6–8, 2009 2nd International Bear Care Conference: Advancing Bear Care '09—San Francisco, CA. More info at www.bearcaregroup.org

April 15–18, 2010 4th Otter Keeper Workshop—Cincinnati Zoo, Cincinnati, OH. Information at www.otterspotter.com

Sept. 24–28, 2011 National AAZK Conference—San Diego, CA, hosted by SD AAZK at the Westin Gaslamp Hotel. More info to come.

Go to SD AAZK's web site, www.sdaazk.org, to find out more about upcoming events!