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# The Keeper

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

## Message from the President

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

Wow! It's 2009 already. I guess I am always amazed at how quickly every year goes by. And this year, like all the years before, the San Diego chapter of AAZK is looking at how best to get its members involved in a variety of activities, conservation, and education.

For the next 2.5 years, expect to see a lot of fundraising events. "Why," you ask? Well, in case you haven't heard, we are hosting the 2011 AAZK Conference. That's right. The 2011 AAZK Conference will happen right here in our own back yard where we'll be able to share our experiences with keepers from other zoos, national and international.

The animal collection found in the Zoological Society of San Diego (ZSSD) is quite extensive. Such a variety of species provides great opportunities for learning and professional growth, and that is what we hope to provide at the 2011 conference—knowledge of what zoo professionals have learned throughout the years.

It won't be only ZSSD professionals who share information. We also plan to have a wide range of professionals from various institutions and every branch of zoo keeping and animal care who will participate in an exchange of ideas and experience.

Zoo keeping is an ever growing and changing profession. Methodologies that were used in the past are no longer considered up to date or appropriate. Providing workshops and paper sessions that teach the various phases and techniques in animal care management are ideal ways of maximizing the time we will have together during the conference. As we are seeing, conferences are more geared toward providing educational opportunities. So, needless to say, we are very excited to have the opportunity to provide a venue for teaching subjects that are important in modern zoo keeping and captive animal care.

The 2011 conference will also be an opportunity for SD AAZK to show off the locations where its members work and live. See the video we presented at the 2008 AAZK Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, to get a small idea of where we call home. Log on to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search for "San Diego AAZK conference bid." It demonstrates some of the things we are proud of and have to offer in San Diego.

We look forward to seeing everyone in 2011 and hope you can be a part of the excitement. Delegates and volunteers wanted!



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# Bonobo Infant Reintroductions

by Matthew Akel, Collections Husbandry Science Lead, Primates, Zoo

The San Diego Zoo currently houses four male and six female bonobos (*Pan paniscus*). Two of these were maternally neglected infants, Mali and Tutapenda, whose mothers were hand raised and had histories of stillbirths. As a result, our animal care staff had to hand raise these young bonobos and attempt to reintroduce them back into their natal troop as earlier as possible. In order to succeed, the San Diego Zoo staff devised a game plan. It was critical to reevaluate previous hand rearing protocols, which led to the decision that a rapid complete immersion of the infants into the bonobo environment and eventual troop integration would greatly benefit them socially and physically. Ultimately, we hope to break the cycle of hand rearing by being proactive in our approach to bonobo infant reintroductions.

Our first step was to install a portable cage in front of the bonobo bedrooms to facilitate visual and audible introductions whenever unprotected sessions were not feasible. Keeper staff was doubled to assist with the increased work load. Unnecessary staff was restricted from the building, and camera equipment was installed to remotely monitor the introductions. In addition, a bedroom was converted into a temporary nursery with visual access to the troop.

Being hand raised by the Zoo's primate nursery keepers, Mali and Tutapenda began daily excursions to our bonobo facility. Initially, introductions were limited to visual and protected contact to assess the troops' acceptance and limit any injuries to the infants. These sessions lasted up to eight hours and progressed fairly quickly to unprotected introductions within a small transfer chute that allowed for swift keeper intervention. This chute was modified with numerous small access doors for emergency purposes.

Utilizing our experienced keepers' knowledge of bonobo behavior, positive interactions of all troop members with the infants was the usual outcome. The bond between these animals and their primary caretaker was essential to the success of the reintroduction. Positive reinforcement was used to reward positive interactions among the troop and the infants. Additionally, implemented behaviors such as to "hold" and "carry" were rewarded to encourage females to bond with Mali and Tutapenda. Knowing when to intercede during unsuccessful or unsafe sessions was a crucial skill of the caretaker.

As a result of many successful introductions, Mali and Tutapenda now spend all day and night in the bonobo facility and do not require constant supervision. While they are almost fully integrated into the entire troop, it is likely that these infants will continue to have surrogate troop members to look after them during their exploration of their exhibit and bedrooms.

Hand rearing is a time and labor intensive process that is not an ideal situation. Hopefully, our animal care staff's approach of immersing the infants in the realm of the bonobo will eventually break this cycle of hand rearing.

Thanks to Mike Bates, Senior Keeper, Greg Vicino, Animal Care Supervisor for Primates, Primate Nursery staff, and Heart of the Zoo's keepers who made this reintroduction a success.

# Bonobo Infant Reintroductions

by Matthew Akel, Collections Husbandry Science Lead, Primates, Zoo

## BONOBO INFANT REINTRODUCTIONS

Matthew Akel  
Collections Husbandry Science Lead, Primates  
San Diego Zoo

### Challenge

•How did our animal care staff reintroduce two hand raised and neglected bonobo infants back into their natal troop?



### Game plan and Execution

- Complete immersion of infants into bonobo building immediately
- Protected visual and tactile introductions in a troop, followed by unprotected introductions in a small transfer chute to allow keeper control in case of emergency
- Initially, unprotected intros occurred every day for 1-2 hours. Infants stayed in intro cage in front of bedrooms during the day, returning to the primate nursery at night.
- Currently, Mali and Tutapenda spend all day and night integrating with varied troop members.



### Utilizing the Bond between Keeper and Troop

- Primary keeper used positive reinforcement to reward positive interactions with infants
- Initially, Ikela and Lolita did not show overwhelming interest, so potential surrogates were also rewarded for their care of Mali and Tutapenda
- Behaviors such as "hold" and "carry" have successfully encouraged females to interact with infants in the past.
- Experienced keeper knew the critical moment when to intervene with introductions



### History

- 4.6 bonobos currently housed at the San Diego Zoo
- Mali born on September 4, 2007. Dam: Ikela, history of two stillborns. Mali was delivered at zoo's hospital with difficulty and temporarily suffered from brachial palsy (paralysis of the arm due to an injury).
- Tutapenda born on October 29, 2007. Dam: Lolita, history of one stillborn, and two successful births
- Both dams were hand raised
- Both infants were hand raised by Children's Zoo primate nursery and primate staff due to maternal neglect



### Steps to Success

- Keeper staff increased to two on bonobo string to enable longer introductions and observations
- Restricted unnecessary contact of staff around infants to avoid virus transmission
- Installed additional removable panels in transfer chute for easier access to infants during introductions
- Better lighting installed for improved observations and remote monitoring
- Introduction cage installed in front of bonobo bedrooms
- Converted extra bedroom into a temporary nursery with a translucent window for visual introductions



### Future Goals

- Fully reintroduce Mali and Tutapenda into bonobo troop inside bedrooms followed by their exhibit
- Break the cycle of bonobo hand rearing by incorporating neglected infants back into the troop as quickly as possible and by minimizing human contact



### Acknowledgements

- Greg Vicino, Animal Care Supervisor, Primates, San Diego Zoo
- Mike Bates, Senior Keeper, Primates, San Diego Zoo
- San Diego Zoo's Primate Nursery and Heart of the Zoo keepers who helped make this reintroduction process a success.

# Al Toth Goes to Mexico City

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK; Sr. Hospital Keeper, Zoo

Many keepers have a tendency to visit zoos when they are on vacation. I think I can safely say that goes for most zoo employees.

Al Toth, a former San Diego Zoo horticulturist, visited Mexico City and decided he would like to meet with some of the zoo's employees to ask about their programs and share information. After getting in touch with the zoo's director, he set up meetings with their enrichment coordinator and veterinarians.

There are three zoos in Mexico City that operate under one umbrella. The zoos are Chapultepec, Los Coyotes, and San Juan de Aragon. Each one has its own specialty and style, and is operated separately from the others.

Al's goal for his visit to the Mexico City zoos was to share information with personnel about incorporating horticulture into the daily maintenance of exhibits and enrichment, and assist in putting together a browse program.

The beauty of working in a zoo environment is that it constantly changes, providing multiple opportunities to learn and grow. When Al expressed his desire to share his knowledge, Mexico City's zoos were grateful for his generosity and made their employees available to him.

Many principles of zoo keeping are the same, but how they are accomplished varies. Typically in Mexico, a keeper's sole duty is to feed the animals and clean exhibits. They do not provide enrichment, training, or conduct any behavioral husbandry. Those duties are assigned to the biologists—there is a definite line separating the duties of each group.

Then there are the grounds keepers. These are gardeners. They are not horticulturists who grow and cultivate plants, or make sure that exhibits are nicely maintained. Instead, grounds keepers are people who basically provide a type of yard maintenance service. They mow, cut, and rake. Most did not own any type of pruning device or have any horticultural knowledge.

As soon as Al recognized the duties of each group, he was able to share what he has learned throughout his years at the San Diego Zoo. He spoke of growing plants that could be used not only to decorate certain areas, but, when pruned properly, could be used as browse for many species of animals. He showed them how to create more appealing exhibits by providing greenery and how the greenery could also provide enrichment opportunities.

And that was another mental obstacle. Plants which we consider dangerous and toxic to animals were growing freely in several exhibits. He was even told that the fruit from some of those "toxic" plants made a delicious tea!

Al shared lots of information and even visited these zoos several times during the year. The incredible thing is that he did not know anyone the first time he arrived. People in our profession are generous when it comes to sharing information and there are many who are eager to listen.

We can go anywhere in the world and be received with smiles and open ears. The opportunity for us to grow in animal care knowledge is as big as we are willing to extend ourselves!

# Where the Wild Dogs Are

by Tina Hunter, Mammal Keeper, Wild Animal Park

What are keepers when they are not being keepers? They are mothers, fathers, friends, gym rats, writers, and baristas at the local Starbucks. This keeper doesn't have time for any of that. The perpetual student, I am always studying and trying to learn new things. Sometimes frustrating, sometimes irritating, always rewarding. For the last two years, I have been focusing most of my research endeavors on African wild dogs.

African wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are the second most endangered carnivore in Africa (the first being the Ethiopian wolf), numbering less than 6,000 animals worldwide. They are tall, a lean 40 to 60 lbs., and are well recognized for their huge, seemingly out of proportion, ears.

These dogs live in large packs, numbering up to 40 members and have quite the repertoire of vocalizations to stay in contact with each other. The pack consists of a dominant pair, their pups and (mostly male) babysitters held over from previous litters. At between 1.5–2 years old, most pups will emigrate out.

Extremely efficient hunters, a large African wild dog pack can take down a full-sized zebra, eland, or wildebeest. They can reach 25–35 mph, maintain this speed over long distances, and run their prey into exhaustion.

My research started in 2003 at the University of Pretoria in South Africa and finally came to fruition in beautiful San Diego. In the summer of 2007, I started watching our dogs at the San Diego Zoo (SDZ)—Whoopi, Wanda, and our dearly departed Jasper—focusing on the use of space in their exhibit. This took over 150 hours of sitting on a hot, broken down speed ramp in the middle of summer. Not a pleasant experience but part of the research “thing.”

I observed even more behaviors than the keepers because they were busy doing their job with other string animals. As keepers, our usual gripe is that we don't have enough time to spend just observing our animals. I'm glad I had the opportunity to do that for them.

Then, in the spring of 2008, I had the opportunity to study a pack of 15 at the Bronx Zoo, where I studied space use and pack dynamics.

To spare all of you the boring statistical analysis...basically, I found that the SDZ dogs spend about 80% of their time snoozing in the shade on dirt or concrete; meanwhile, those 'wild' Bronx dogs have a larger pack to keep busy and spent about 50% of their time playing, chasing, and just running about. Thus, my primary finding was that African wild dogs in captivity tend to be more active in larger packs.

Possible plans for studying the packs at the Wilds in Ohio and the Wild Animal Park's future exhibit keep my head in the game. At some point, this keeper will go back to South Africa and defend her thesis. But for now, I am enjoying my rewarding job as a keeper.

## Kobey's Swap Meet Fundraiser

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK

Every year, SD AAZK holds at least two swap meet events to raise money for different conservation organizations. On September 21, 2008, it was that time again and raise money we did.

We raised \$1,000; \$600 went to Polar Bears International, the remainder set aside for hosting AAZK's 2011 conference.

The preparation for any event always begins long before the event itself. Board members spoke with the Rancho Bernardo warehouse, placed ads in the Zoo's Flash, and negotiated with a local U-Haul business to try to get the most merchandise with the lowest expense. Thanks to Rosa at the RB warehouse, five pallets of charitable items were loaded into a 14 foot U-Haul truck. Additionally, Zoo employees and friends donated unused goods.

I'd also like to thank Leticia Plasencia, Bill Whipple, Laurie Brogan, Nicki Boyd, Brook Boyd, and Matt Akel for their tireless efforts. Also, thank you to Aimee Goldcamp for picking up the items at the RB Warehouse and Rosa-Rivas Camacho for the incredible donation and organization the Zoo's charitable goods. Thank you to Erik at U-Haul Midway for the fantastic discount rate, and to everyone who donated items and wished us success. AAZK really does rely on all participants.

## Come one, come all—volunteer for the 2011 Conference!

by Laurie L. Brogan, Sr. Bird Keeper, San Diego Zoo

I will never forget attending my first Pacific Seabird Conference. It was 1992 and I was working at the Oregon Coast Aquarium.

It was a great opportunity for several reasons. First, it got me out of a small town and into the big city—Portland, Oregon! Second, I was able to network with a vast amount of keepers, researchers, and scientists who worked with birds in the wild and in zoo settings. The thought of being able to speak with a researcher who was on an isolated island or out in the ocean studying birds in their native habitat—what a treat! Or to be able connect with a keeper from another zoo and hear how they care for the birds in their collection. There is just nothing like the thrill of meeting such professionals and, more importantly, learning new ways to help the animals in your care.

Presenting papers or posters is a great way to network at any conference, but another great overlooked area is volunteering! Not only does this remove the pressure of getting that paper done on time, or speaking in front of a large crowd, but you get to have lots of fun and meet new people!

We are looking for everyone and anyone that can volunteer time to help the San Diego chapter of AAZK when we host the 2011 Conference. The great thing about volunteering is just that—you get to volunteer the amount of time you can give us. We are looking for folks to help with just about everything. If you think you don't have the skills to help, well that is just crazy. There will be so many things that we need help with—greeting people while they enter, setting up video equipment, showing participants around the zoo and park, etc. We have icebreakers planned, off-site trips, and so much more. Believe me, we can use you.

I cannot even begin to list all of the many areas where we will need help. As the time draws near, SD AAZK will have a list of duties. If you don't see something that you think needs attention, let us know. We just may not have thought of it yet. See, that's why we need you! And then there's the whole fun factor of being a part of a large event and having fun while you're volunteering.

This is going to be a wonderful opportunity to meet folks from all over the country; to see in person the voice you've only heard over the phone or name you've only seen in emails; or to be able to network, learn, and exchange ideas with other professionals. There is nothing like it.

So please, do not let this rare opportunity pass you by. Come one, come all. **Volunteer!**



# Excuse Us While We Fundraise

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK

It's all about the 2011 AAZK Conference right now—selecting the hotel, choosing the theme, working out the itinerary, etc. There really is a lot that needs to happen before the conference even begins.

Our goal is to host a conference that is affordable to everyone, yet with many learning and recreational opportunities. To make that happen, we need to raise funds to cover as many costs as possible, recruit as many volunteers as possible, and obtain as many sponsors as possible. So with that in mind, look for several fundraising events during the next few years.

We recently sold Entertainment Books filled with coupons and special deals. By purchasing Entertainment Books sold by SD AAZK, a portion of the sales are donated to SD AAZK's fund. Our Entertainment Book sales are done for this year but be sure to watch for our flyer in November and December for the 2010 edition.

We are also in the process of raising funds by recycling drink pouches, a non-recyclable item that is sent to landfills by the billions every year. These pouches will be sewn together to make bags and sold at participating retail stores.

For every drink pouch that we recycle, two cents will be donated to SD AAZK's fund. This might seem like a small amount of money, but it is an easy way to raise funds and recycle a major trash item at the same time. If you would like a flyer and more information, please send us an email. This is great for those of you with children in school; now there's a sea of drink pouches!

In addition, look for our "Eating Out" fundraisers. Many restaurants offer the opportunity to raise money for charities by organizing a day when the meal you purchase will count towards a fundraising event. We will let you know where and when that time comes. All you'll have to do is print our special coupon and present it at the designated restaurant on the day of the event.

Our next "Eating Out" fundraiser will be at the Souplantation on Clairemont Mesa Blvd on Wednesday, February 25. Stay tuned for the flyer that you will need to bring to the restaurant.

These are just a few of our easy, upcoming fundraising activities to supplement our biannual swap meets and social get-togethers. Stay tuned to our web site for more details. And this year, Bowling for Rhinos will become Bowling for the Conference; it'll be the same fun and excitement of BFR, just a different cause. BFC is scheduled for June; keep your calendar open.

Other ideas are in the works. If you have any suggestions, we'd love to hear them. Let's raise some money for 2011!

## DRINK POUCH RECYCLE

All drink pouches are accepted (even those with 100% recycled content). There are no restrictions on pouches of any size.

**Help the San Diego chapter of the  
American Association of Zoo Keepers**

**Raise funds by recycling**

According to the Container Recycling Institute, 3.6 billion drink pouches are produced each year, and because they are non-recyclable, virtually every single one is sent to a landfill.

Twice a year Honest Tea will write a check to SD AAZK, donating \$.02 per Honest Kids drink pouch and \$.01 per regular drink pouch you helped recycle.

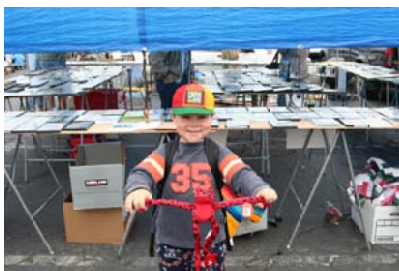
Drink pouches will be sewn together to make bags that will be sold at participating retail stores.

For more information or details how you can help, write to:

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Send us your email address so we can notify you when the latest issue of *The Keeper* is available at our web site.

## CALENDAR

### LOCAL EVENTS

**January 30, 2009 Cheetah Conservation Fund**—Mary Wykstra presents at the Zoo's Rondavel. 2:30 social, 3:00 presentation.

**February 27, 2009 Giving Back**—Climate Change and Polar Bears. Zoo's Rondavel. 2:30 social, 3:00 presentation by JoAnne Simerson.

**March 2009 Visit Mexicali Zoo**—date to be determined. Passport required.

**June 20, 2009 Bowling for Rhinos**—more info to come.

**July 19–25, 2009 National Zoo Keeper Week**—more info to come.

### NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

**April 30–May 2, 2009 Prosimian Husbandry Workshop**—hosted by the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. More info at [www.clemetzoo.com/prosimianworkshop](http://www.clemetzoo.com/prosimianworkshop)

**May 17–21, 2009 Rhino Keeper Workshop**—Busch Gardens, Tampa, FL. Updates at [www.rhinokeepersassociation.org](http://www.rhinokeepersassociation.org)

**May 31–June 5, 2009 Ninth International Conference on Environmental Enrichment**—Torquay, Devon, UK. Details at <http://www.enrichment.org/ICEE9.html>

**Sept. 2, 2009: Third Orangutan SSP Husbandry Workshop**—Zoo Atlanta. For more info email [theitz@zooatlanta.org](mailto: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](http://www.pugetsoundaazk.org)

**September 2011: AAZK Conference**—hosted by San Diego AAZK chapter. More info to come.

Go to SD AAZK's web site, [www.sdaazk.org](http://www.sdaazk.org), to find out more about upcoming events!