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# The Keeper

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

## Message from the President

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

The last few months have been very busy. The board has been working hard to schedule events for the entire year. We have a lot planned for 2009.

The biggest event planning was selecting a site for the 2011 National AAZK Conference that we will host. After many site visits, negotiations, and so many other things I didn't even dream of, we have the location and dates.

*The 2011 National AAZK Conference will be held August 24-28 at the Westin Gaslamp Quarter hotel. We visited numerous excellent hotels (Westin Downtown, Sheraton Harbor Island, Omni Hotel, Town and Country, Catamaran, Hilton Shelter Island, etc.), and deciding on one was difficult. In the end, Westin Gaslamp's great location, helpful staff, beautiful accommodations, and affordability made the difference.*

I am pleased to inform you that *room rates will be very reasonably priced at \$159 per night.*

Our goals for the conference include making it affordable, educational, and memorable. Since San Diego is such a great place, we hope that many delegates will attend the conference (we estimate 300). ConVis (the San Diego Conference Bureau) will help us to keep the delegates entertained during their visit...when they are not in conference sessions, of course.

The Zoo's departments and staff have been extremely supportive of our efforts. I've met with several groups and have been amazed at how much they are willing to do to help make the conference a great success. As details are ironed out, your SD AAZK board members will inform you about fundraising events that will support the conference's expenses.

Speaking of fundraising, this year's bowling event (scheduled for June 20) will play an important role. When SD AAZK was selected to host the 2011 conference, our first reaction was "How can we raise what we'll need to support this conference?" Think about it, we have never really saved any of the money that we have raised. And we have raised thousands of dollars! Every year for the last 15 years, SD AAZK has sponsored Bowling for Rhinos (BFR), a very popular social and fundraising event to help rhinos. We also have given money to one cause or another such as keeper funding for conferences, red pandas, polar bears, Grevy's zebras, and yes, rhinos.

While researching and networking, we learned that other chapters used BFR as a fundraiser when they hosted the conference. This makes sense. BFR is the biggest fundraiser for any chapter. AAZK is all about conservation and education, something that a conference promotes and teaches in its workshops. Conferences are a way to share and learn about promoting the survival of habitats and their native species.

This year's fundraising event, Bowling For Professional Excellence, will be held so that we, the keepers and personnel at the Zoo and Wild Animal Park, can share what we have learned in our field. The conference also provides an arena where others can share information with us as well. In the end, conservation and animal care win.

Our goal for this event is to raise sufficient funds to host a memorable conference and donate the remainder to worthwhile conservation projects around the world and send keepers to work on them. That's what conservation is all about—learning, sharing, and doing. That's what AAZK does!

### Table of contents

President's Message	1
Cheetah research in Kenya	2-3
Giving back to polar bears	3-4
AAZK update	5
Conservation research	5
Updates	6-7
Soup and salad fundraiser	7
Calendar of Events	8

## Cheetah research in Kenya—a talk by Mary Wykstra

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

Mary Wykstra studied pre-veterinary medicine at Calvin College in Michigan, but later changed her focus to animal behavior at Michigan State University where, in 1987, she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology. She began working with exotic animals when she became a zoo keeper at Binder Park Zoo that year. Later, Mary moved to Utah's Hogle Zoo where she eventually was promoted to exhibits curator, designing enclosures and supervising construction and renovations. In 1998, Mary chaired a zoo keeper initiated fundraising event called the "Cheetah Cha-Cha," now an annual event, and that was the beginning of her involvement with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF).

In 2000, Mary led the design and construction team for the Education Center at CCF's Namibia location and became CCF's Kenya representative during the next year. Since then she has been collecting data pertinent to conflicts between cheetahs and farmers, surveying cheetah distribution, and determining cheetah conservation needs across the country. Mary also maintains communication between CCF Kenya, Namibia, and Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) in order to establish cooperation in understanding cheetah status in Kenya, while developing conservation and education programs.

On January 31, Mary informed us about her work with CCF and cheetahs in Kenya. CCF's mission is to be an internationally recognized center of excellence in research and education on cheetahs and their eco-systems, working with all stakeholders to achieve best practice in the conservation and management of the world's cheetahs. Mary began by giving us the numbers: in 1900 there were approximately 100,000; in 2000, about 12,500 (with a group of 50 in Iran).

From 2000 to 2004, CCF research activities have included interviews and evaluations in Nakuru (where Mary began her work), then Machakos and Laikipia Wildlife forums. She stated that we know very little about cheetahs. Biologically we know them, but we need to know more on how to work with the people and politics that touch their lives.

To learn more about cheetahs, she started to look at Kenya's occurrence data, which indicate predator-related incidents. She found that 174 cases were attributed to cheetahs. Of these, 50% were livestock incidents that occurred in Nakuru. Nakuru has a livestock compensation plan, so it is a way to track predator incidents. Unfortunately, because there is a compensation plan, cheetahs may be blamed for more incidents than they are involved in. *(continued on p.3)*



## Cheetah research in Kenya—*continued*

Occurrence data for 1994–2004 showed that there were 2,618 predator related incidents. Of these, 139 were reported as cheetah-related. Again, the high number of reported cheetah incidents could be due to compensation rather than that more cheetahs live in the region.

In February 2007, Mary's data showed that 16% of eastern Africa habitat still supported cheetahs, whereas another 50% may support them and 33% was extirpated and unrecoverable. Her December 2008 survey showed that there were pocketed populations in the northwest which had problems due to possible inbreeding.

Threats to cheetah survival include poaching (primarily by use of snares), the pet trade, and how they've been targeted as a problem animal. For livestock owners, the consequence of cheetah conflicts comes down to economic loss. Small livestock are cheetahs' most common targets. The impact of cheetah depredation comes out to approximately \$100 per household, which for that part of the world is a substantial amount. By teaching farmers how to better protect their livestock, CCF has already been able to reduce the numbers of predator incidents by 50%.

CCF is also looking into introducing a way to have farmers profit through conservation by introducing activities like safaris, camel back, and horse back excursions through cheetah habitat. They are also trying to reduce conflicts by increasing awareness about cheetahs. Cheetahs hunt during the day and their preferred prey are dik dik and gazelles. If these prey animals are poached and land is subdivided, cheetahs will focus on livestock.

"Our voice is the voice of the cheetah." Mary invited everyone to look into becoming a CCF volunteer. Volunteers can participate in the program for up to three weeks and assist with their science, education, and community programs. There are also fundraisers everyone can participate in.

To learn more about Mary's work with CCF, how you can volunteer, and to help with fundraising, visit their website at [www.cheetah.org](http://www.cheetah.org), or send an email to [cheetah@africaonline.co.ke](mailto:cheetah@africaonline.co.ke).

## Giving back to polar bears—a talk by JoAnne Simerson

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

On February 27, JoAnne Simerson (San Diego Zoo polar bear keeper and [Polar Bears International \(PBI\)](#) advisory council member) shared information she has collected in her work with wild and captive polar bears. She also consults with Conservation Manitoba Natural Resource's officers on the polar bear alert program and housing of bears in their compound.

The San Diego Zoo's polar bears—Chinook, Kalluk, and Tatqiq—have become ambassadors for their wild counterparts in the Arctic through their participation in experiments designed to address questions about polar bears in the wild.

One of the questions is how polar bears find each other in the Arctic. Researchers have found that males follow females' tracks, paying attention to where they walk. To learn more about chemical signaling, the Zoo's keepers have trained our bears to allow inter-digital swabs. Preliminary findings indicate that a female's paw scent changes when she is cycling, and that pedal scents are more important than urine scents in polar bear attraction at breeding time. Unfortunately, with the Arctic ice melting at its current rate, there are fewer scents available for the bears to follow.

The Zoo's polar bears additionally have participated in studies on reproduction and olfaction funded by PBI. The bears first had to be trained to allow vaginal swabs for cytology. As some of you may know, Chinook and Kalluk have been breeding quite a bit lately. JoAnne hopes that, if Chinook becomes pregnant, they will be able to monitor the pregnancy closely and even perform ultrasounds.

Several years ago, U.S. Fish and Wildlife asked if the Zoo's polar bears could assist with hearing studies that could make a difference in polar bear conservation. Current laws prohibit industrial activity within one mile of a known den site. Because bears have sensitive hearing, excessive noise from drilling could potentially damage their hearing, interfere with species-specific communication, and cause stress. (*continued on page 4*)

## Giving back to polar bears—*continued*

The study involved numerous challenges—shield the testing environment from extraneous noises (buses and other vehicles, Balboa Park's clock tower bells, etc.), desensitize the bears to the auditory equipment, generalize the “pinger” to different tones, keep the bears on task, avoid inadvertently signaling the bears when to respond, and determine whether the bear understood the behavior it was supposed to perform. For validity, the experimenters needed to be blind to the study's testing conditions; in other words, the person reinforcing the bear couldn't know when the bear was supposed to respond. This required two experimenters—one to handle the equipment and one to reward the bear—who needed to communicate without cueing the bear!

The experiment involved over 4,000 trials which measured the bears' response latency and accuracy. This effort paid off with invaluable acuity data that will help in constructing exhibits, understanding bear hearing sensitivity, and showing how human activities might adversely affect polar bears.

JoAnne also is involved with PBI, running their In Field Ambassador program in Churchill which recruits keepers from zoos around the country to inspire tourists to make changes in their lives that will help save polar bear habitat. In addition, she also plays a role in PBI's Student Leadership Camp program which sends a lucky 16 year old student to Churchill to learn more about polar bears and assist in various studies. Beginning this year, keepers also will be selected to participate. Contact JoAnne Simerson or Kathy Myers (Education Department) for more information.

As the earth warms and the Arctic melts, knowledge of how polar bears and other Arctic species live is crucial. Polar bear population trends have shown us that arctic sea ice melting has a direct correlation with the decline in polar bear numbers and their body condition. JoAnne's observations from the last eight years in Churchill demonstrate dramatic changes in bears' behaviors, such as congregating in family groups rather than living solitary, a reduction in play and sparing, and families congregating on the edge of the Hudson Bay waiting for the water to freeze. Predicted weather trends indicate that bear populations could decline more than 60% within the next 48 years due to increasing global temperatures.

People have the power to make a change and keepers have the opportunity to impact and inspire people to change. What can we do to “give back?” Zoo attendance is around 4 million per year. That means we as zoo personnel have 4 million opportunities to educate someone about these global climate changes that jeopardize polar bears' survival.

You have to ask yourself: what can I do to make an impact and give back?



## National AAZK update

by Bob Cisneros, AAZK Board Member

We are looking for a few good members; board members, that is.

It's election time again and this year national AAZK is taking an electronic approach. In order to review the candidates prior to voting, go to <http://www.aazk.org/members/index.php>. Click the link to review the candidates and then proceed to vote.

While in the Member's Area, you will also be able to vote for the 2012 conference site. You must be a national member in order to vote.

The joint AAZK/ICZ conference in Seattle. is just months away Conference dates are September 24–29. It will be held at the Red Lion Hotel on 5th Avenue in Seattle. This will be the first joint conference of AAZK and ICZ and the first time that ICZ has ever been hosted in the United States. Over 300 delegates from around the world will be in attendance. The conference program includes paper sessions and workshops geared towards professional development.

For more information, go the Puget Sound AAZK website at <http://www.pugetsoundaazk.org/conference.html>.

## Connecting the collection to conservation—a talk by Dr. Fred Bercovitch

by Tina Hunter, WAP Mammal Keeper

On April 8, SD AAZK had the great honor of hosting a talk by Dr. Fred Bercovitch, head of the Division of Behavioral Biology and Director of San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research (formerly known as CRES).

Dr. Bercovitch received his Ph.D. in 1985 from U.C.L.A. and has been contributing to research in the conservation field ever since. He has authored and co-authored over 100 books, articles, papers, and abstracts.

Scientists have been testing Darwin's theories since the publishing of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Dr. Bercovitch is a supporter of the father of evolutionary biology and suggests that the three most influential theories may be reproductive competition, mate selection, and maternal investment. He has been involved in various research projects which suggest that none of these occurs randomly. Regardless of genetics (as in suggestions by Species Survival Plans and Population Management Programs), the animals may not want to mate with their intended partner.

In his talk, Dr. Bercovitch gave an overview on the following current projects.

Giraffe—studies conducted at the WAP have determined that neither the age of the female nor inter-birth interval can determine sex ratio, as was previously thought.

Nile lechwe—studies, also conducted at the WAP, have determined that older females have male offspring 75% of the time, but 72% of the time the son dies within 24 hours. The dams, in these cases, also tend to die.

Cheetah—extensive CRES studies suggest that playbacks of male “stutter barks” stimulate ovulation in females and these have been used successfully in breeding protocols.

Koala—studies at the San Diego Zoo and in the wild point to the facts that 1) male scent glands (located on the chest) get larger as they get older, and 2) if males and females are too far apart in age, breeding is unsuccessful.

African elephants—there have been some very cool studies at the WAP with collaring elephants to track where they go in their exhibit and holding areas. They are followed 24 hours, 7 days a week. Researchers hope that the results will help with resolving human/wild elephant conflicts through management.

Dr. Bercovitch praised keepers at both the Zoo and WAP for their record keeping. Next time you fill out those sometimes tedious daily logs (aka Red Books), recall that the information may some day be very important for research purposes.

## SD AAZK updates

by Yvette Kemp, President, SD AAZK

The Zoo, WAP, and SD AAZK are hotspots of activity in 2009. Here's a summary of what's been happening and what's on the horizon.

At the Zoo, Elephant Odyssey (EO) is scheduled to open on May 23, 2009. Keepers working directly and indirectly with this new exhibit have played a key role in preparations for its grand opening. For instance, animals that will inhabit EO had to go into quarantine at the hospital and get prepared for their new exhibits. Keepers had to attend orientation and training sessions for presentations that they will give to the Zoo's guests. The list goes on—keepers and animals are literally in non-stop mode. Once things have settled down, we hope to talk with EO's keepers to get the inside story on this exhibit's operations.

At the WAP, workers have constructed and set up the new Flightline attraction, which is a 3,600+ foot zipline covering almost two thirds of a mile at close to 200 feet above the ground and moving at 35–40 miles per hour. Some of our SD AAZK members have experienced the ride and had only positive comments about it—awesome view, cool, exciting, and way fun.

SD AAZK has been quite active lately, too. Our board members conducted a search for the site for the 2011 National AAZK Conference, August 24–28, that we will host. After more than six months of research and traveling around San Diego, we decided on downtown's Westin Gaslamp Hotel near Horton Plaza. This hotel's facilities and location were tops. It offers 450 guest rooms and ample meeting space to meet the conference's needs. The guest room price for delegates will be affordable at \$159 plus taxes for a double room. In addition, the Westin Gaslamp is centrally located in downtown, within walking distance of many restaurants, shops, and activities. When delegates are not in conference sessions, they'll have plenty of tourist opportunities without having to pay for transportation. Our intention is for the conference to be "green," so we are working out details for various green options in collaboration with the Zoo's Internal Conservation Committee.

The Zoo has been very supportive of our efforts to raise money for the conference. SD AAZK's board members have met with various department's leaders for ideas and fundraising partnerships that will help support the conference's expenses. We really do want to make this event as affordable, and memorable, as possible; we are doing all we can to make that achievable. By starting our fundraising efforts now, we are well on our way toward attaining that goal.

Speaking of fundraising activities, the first of our bi-annual swap meets at Kobey's Sports Arena will have already happened by the time you read this; it will be on Saturday, May 2.; the second will be Saturday, October 3. The WAP's Rancho Bernardo warehouse has always been very generous, donating many items. Members and zoo employees are also very giving and we greatly appreciate their support.

Another important fundraiser for the 2011 AAZK Conference is scheduled for Thursday, May 28 at the Jamba Juice on Robinson Avenue. A percentage of sales that day will be donated to our chapter. Stay tuned for flyers and details!

Our biggest fundraiser of this year will be Bowling for Professional Excellence on June 20. The Zoo's Human Resources Department promises to be as generous as in the past and the 35 lanes await our arrival. The social aspect, silent auction, and raffle prizes of this event have contributed to its tremendous successes each year. Be sure to fill out and send in your team sign up sheet now ([http://homepage.mac.com/sdaazk.org/BFPE\\_team\\_form.doc](http://homepage.mac.com/sdaazk.org/BFPE_team_form.doc)). Cost per team is \$45; payment must be received by June 13 at the latest, but send it in sooner to guarantee your team's lane. Each bowler must bring in a minimum of \$40 of sponsorship to participate. Prizes will be available for those who bring in the most sponsorship that evening.

During National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW), SD AAZK will host a fundraiser at Stone Cold Creamery. Bring in our special flier so that profits can go to AAZK. Stay tuned for flyers and more information as the date gets closer.

Speaking of NZKW, which is scheduled for July 19–25, this year's event will mark its third anniversary. NZKW originated here in San Diego and it continues to educate Zoo and WAP guests about the many aspects of a zoo keeper's career. A booth on the Zoo's grounds will be staffed by keepers (who will share their stories with guests and answer questions) every day during the celebratory week. We have other activities for which the details are still being worked out. Stay tuned!

*(continued on page 7)*

## **SD AAZK updates—*continued***

In addition to these fundraising activities, SD AAZK also is planning our annual Photo Caravan (October date to be determined). This event always is a big hit—two trucks transport a total of 24 participants through the WAP's plains exhibits while educators and keepers provide a narration about the latest in animal news.

On another note, SD AAZK has been in a bit of a bind regarding our membership. In the past, our chapter has been lenient in complying with National and local membership regulations. Per AAZK Chapter Formation Guidelines 8.01-2, local chapter members are also required to be registered as National AAZK members.

The bind is that SD AAZK has never enforced this membership regulation. Unfortunately, beginning this year, National AAZK will charge each chapter \$10 for every member who does not belong to National AAZK. Because of this regulation, we may be changing our membership dues for those who are not National AAZK members to reflect this charge. Our chapter liaison is asking that we re-examine the bylaws at the next National Board meeting in Seattle and make a provision which allows chapters to continue having local members who are not National members without violating the regulations. We think this issue affects chapters everywhere, and is especially true during the current economic times. We will be sure to keep you posted on that news as well.

We will also keep you up to date on all the fundraising activities and conference promotions we have planned throughout the next few years. If you would like to be an active participant in any of our activities, please let us know ([thekeepersdaazk@cox.net](mailto:thekeepersdaazk@cox.net)). There will more than plenty for everyone to do!

## **Soup and salad fundraiser**

by Matt Akel, Vice President, SD AAZK

On Wednesday, February 25, SD AAZK members and supporters journeyed to Souplantation in Kearny Mesa to raise money for the approaching 2011 National AAZK Conference to be held in San Diego.

More than 50 supporters from the Zoo and Wild Animal Park attended. We raised \$96.40 which will help chip away at the large amount of money we have to raise by 2011.

As you know, the way to a keeper's heart is through their stomach...so how could you go wrong with an all-you-can-eat buffet? This group bonding experience over soup and salad was a ton of fun, especially when you had to fight over the last piece of chocolate cake, only to realize there are 30 more trays of cake waiting to replace that last piece!

Thank you to everyone who ventured out on a Wednesday night to support our AAZK chapter in its fundraising goals. Stay tuned for additional fun events!

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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

**May 14, 2009 Zoolympics at the Living Desert Zoo**—For more info, email to [ktooker@livingdesert.org](mailto:ktooker@livingdesert.org).

**May 28, 2009 Jamba Juice fundraiser**—510 Robinson Avenue, San Diego. Download and bring our [special flyer](#) to support the 2011 National AAZK Conference in San Diego.

**June 20, 2009 Bowling for Professional Excellence**—Kearney Mesa Bowl, 7585 Clairemont Mesa Blvd., San Diego; check-in 5:00–5:45 p.m.; bowling 6:00–9:00 p.m. Join us in this [fundraiser](#) for the 2011 National AAZK Conference in San Diego.

**July 19–25, 2009 National Zoo Keeper Week**—visit our [events](#) web page for information.

### NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

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

**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](http://www.sdaazk.org), to find out more about upcoming events!