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The Keeper

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

Message from the President

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

There are changes coming that will affect every AAZK chapter and member starting January 1, 2010. It has to do with membership.

As you know, local annual membership for SD AAZK is \$12. This membership entitles you to our quarterly newsletter, The Keeper, free admission to SD AAZK events, and participation in conservation projects that we support (such as PBI, the Red Panda Project, Grevy's Zebra Project, and—the biggest one—Lewa funding through Bowling For Rhinos).

National AAZK annual membership, which has always been encouraged but not enforced, is \$40. It includes a monthly subscription to the Animal Keeper's Forum, rights to vote in board elections and conference host selection, hold office at the board and chapter levels, and qualify for member rates at conferences and for AAZK publications.

Both local and national organizations also offer animal care workers a resource providing public awareness of an affiliation that is dedicated to animal care and conservation. This is a great networking tool for keepers, trainers, and other animal care professionals.

But I digress. Change is a-coming... Starting in 2010, all local AAZK members must also be national AAZK members to be considered a full local member. If you are not a full local member, then you will not receive the benefits we offer our local members. This means you would have to pay the fee for the photo caravan (versus free for members) and any of our other special events.

National AAZK has been lenient with all chapters, but 2010 is when this will end. For every local member who is not a national member, local chapters will be charged \$10 each. That means \$10 per each local member who is not a national member. Those who do not join the national association will still receive our local newsletter but will be listed as contributing individuals instead of members. And if you are not a full member (meaning you belong to San Diego chapter and national), you would have to pay whatever fee is charged for special events.

SD AAZK appreciates your membership and contribution to the chapter. We highly encourage you to become a national member by visiting www.aazk.org and using their convenient PayPal system on the "Join AAZK" page. There are many advantages to belonging to this great organization. Being part of something that not only recognizes the work of people in our industry, but actively supports great programs is hard to come by.

SD AAZK and national AAZK are great organizations. Each supports animal care professionals, each contributes to conservation organizations, and each provides information that is useful for its members needs.

Please visit www.aazk.org today and find out for yourself what they have to offer. You won't regret it!

2009 National Zoo Keeper Week

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President



San Diego AAZK is proud to present this special edition of *The Keeper* which is dedicated to this year's National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW).

NZKW is a national celebration in recognition of the approximately 6,000 zoo keepers, aquarists, and the animal care professionals in America's zoological parks and aquariums. Zoo keepers serve as animal care experts, frontline educators, and conservationists. We are proud to have zoo keepers recognized for the important work they do on behalf of wildlife and conservation. They help increase public awareness about the need to preserve our precious habitats and the animals which inhabit them.

The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) began in San Diego in 1967 with the purpose of promoting professionalism in zoo keeping through education of zoological staff members in the most modern and current techniques of captive exotic animal care.

AAZK is a non-profit volunteer organization made up of professional zoo keepers and other interested persons dedicated to professional animal care and conservation. This organization's mission is to advance excellence in the zoo keeping profession, foster effective communication beneficial to animal care, support deserving conservation projects, and promote the preservation of our natural resources and animal life.

San Diego's AAZK chapter, which helped put together this year's NZKW in San Diego, conducts various fundraising events for conservation organizations worldwide. For example, we have raised over \$2,000 for the Grevy's Zebra Project and close to \$150,000 for rhino conservation (over \$3.1 million nationwide).

Our mission is to

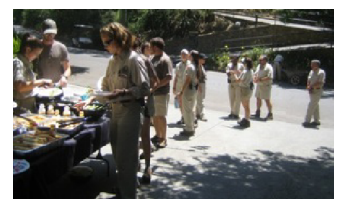
- promote and establish good relationships among professional zoo keepers,
- promote and establish a means to stimulate incentive and greater interest in the zoo keeping profession,
- support deserving conservation projects to include educating the general public about the need for preserving our natural resources and animal life through these worldwide efforts, and
- establish material beneficial to zoo keeper education.

In this special edition of *The Keeper*, you'll find the San Diego Zoo's press release about NZKW, an article from *Zoo View* and *Bringing Zoo Good News* (publications for San Diego Zoo employees), comments from the San Diego Zoo's Board of Trustees and from the general public, and information on how the Zoo and Wild Animal Park celebrated this special week.

It really is amazing how much keepers and animal care staff do in their job. And for many of us, it is much more than just a job, it's a career and a life style.

Thank you to everyone who made this week memorable for not just keepers and animal care staff, but to the hundreds (and even thousands) of people who are touched by what the organizations we work for and are a part of, do for animals and conservation every day.

Thank you keepers...you really are amazing.



San Diego's National Zoo Keeper Week

by Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President

July 19–25, 2009 was the week that keepers and animal care staff celebrated the third annual National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW). This year the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park (WAP) included and spent time with fellow animal care staff from SeaWorld San Diego, the CA Wolf Center, Chula Vista Nature Center, and The Living Desert.

We did a lot that week. NZKW begins the third Saturday of every July and lasts seven days. It was during this special week that keepers and animal care staff were recognized more than usual for their work in the animal care field. As you know, zoo keeping does not just involve cleaning up after animals. In today's zoos and animal facilities, keepers are involved in behavioral observations, medical care, research, training, enrichment, and conservation as a part of the daily animal care.

During this year's NZKW celebration, several activities were scheduled for zoo keepers and animal care staff. One of these activities was to share experiences and expertise with guests in "keeper tents" which were staffed every day at the Zoo and WAP. It was in these keeper tents that guests were able to speak to and learn from animal care staff and see what is involved in daily zoo keeping. They met the different kinds of professionals found at the Zoo and WAP—mammal, bird, reptile, and insect keepers. Guests also met trainers, researchers, and other zoo personnel that help keepers on a regular basis.

Additional activities during the week afforded a rare opportunity for keepers to relax and have fun. Here's what the San Diego Zoo's keepers experienced that week.

On Monday, July 20, all animal care staff were invited to a special pizza lunch at the Zoo's Hunte Amphitheater (cheesy digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)). After a few words from John Dunlap (Zoo Director) and Carmi Penny (Director of Curators), a group photo was taken. Actually, make that two group photos; it was so hot that everyone had bunched into the shady spots with their pizzas and there was no chance of getting anyone into the sun! While they enjoyed their pizza and salad, keepers then watched the new bird show produced by the Natural Encounters team. It was fun being a part of the audience and relaxing for awhile—a nice break for all.

Later that afternoon, SeaWorld San Diego keepers invited the Zoo's keepers to a special behind-the-scenes (fascinating digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)). Thirty lucky keepers and friends were split into two groups and taken to SeaWorld's Avian Center, Penguin Encounter, shark breeding facility, and manatee area. We also got up close with some of the animals they use in their Meet & Greet programs. Needless to say, it was awesome! For almost three hours, keepers met and spoke with many animal care staff who are responsible for SeaWorld's critters. It is always interesting to learn how other keepers take care of the animals in their charge. Much was learned, shared, and enjoyed that afternoon and we can't thank Linda Henry, Debbie Denton, and the rest of the SeaWorld San Diego staff enough for the opportunity.

On Tuesday, July 21, Petco Park honored NZKW (take-us-out-to-the-ballpark digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)). Animal care staff from the Zoo, WAP, SeaWorld, Living Desert Zoo, CA Wolf Center, and Chula Vista Nature Center were on the field with some of their animal friends—an alligator, tamandua, hyacinth macaw, miniature horse, African porcupine, and flock of racer pigeons that were released prior to the game.

Leticia Plasencia, from the Zoo's Heart of the Zoo Team, was the lucky keeper who threw out the first pitch. I must admit she did a great job and made us all proud. And there was a tremendous group of NZKW fans in the stands, way up there in section 305. Thanks to everyone who came out to the game to support the keepers. Oh yes, and there was a baseball game, too. Unfortunately, the Padres were not so lucky against the Florida Marlins and suffered their tenth consecutive loss. Maybe next time we'll bring a lucky rabbit!

On Wednesday, July 22, the Zoo's Human Resources Department invited animal staff to Baja Betty's in Hillcrest (yummy digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)), while the WAP staff went to On the Border in Escondido. There, keepers were wined and dined for a few hours, as we hung out with the Executive Director's team. When HR's money was gone, the Executive Team carried on buying drinks and snacks for all. I would have to say they truly knew the way to a keeper's heart.

Continued on page 4

San Diego's National Zoo Keeper Week (*continued*)

Thursday, July 23, it was time for Zoolympics at Camp Timbuktu (hilarious digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)). Although the turnout was low, keepers from the Zoo and SeaWorld San Diego battled it out on the field. Name That Poop truly stumped everyone, but the other games—or rather events—brought out the competitor in all who participated. After playing Be The Anteater, Hook The Snake, Rubber Ducky Head Count, Moose The Lizard, and Three Legged Race, it was the Keeper Obstacle course that really got the small crowd going. Here two competitors had to race to the end of the course...while wearing a ty-vek suit, face mask, carrying a rake and shovel with a bucket full of water, straddling obstacles, then rolling up a hose they had to add to their repertoire of items to be carried. Then they had to carefully find an egg buried in the mulch, add that to their load, go over a few more obstacles, and end up at the finishing mat with all their items and a full bucket of water! Now that was really fun to watch!

The winners received great prizes donated by John Kling (Food Service Director) and Carmi Penny (Director of Curators). First prize went to Randy Campbell (Heart of the Zoo) who won a \$100 Visa gift card. Second place went to Leticia Plasencia (Heart of the Zoo) who won a \$50 gift card. In third place was Hali Anderson (Sun Bear Forest) with a \$30 gift card and in fourth place was Kelly Murphy who won a \$20 gift card. SeaWorld San Diego staff came in next and won gift certificates to Albert's Restaurant.

During all that week, there was a fundraiser at Cold Stone Creamery in Mission Valley's Fenton Parkway and on Center Drive in San Marcos/Escondido (cool digital picture from this event are on our [website](#)). Up to 25% of sales that week went toward funding for the 2011 National AAZK Conference that we will be hosting. Thanks to everyone who ate ice cream for a good cause. We heard John Dunlap took a group of Zoo staff to eat ice cream one day! Now that's what I call a field trip.

We would like to thank everyone who helped and was a part of this year's NZKW. Thank you to all the keepers, staff, and volunteers who assisted at the keeper tent and helped and participated in the Zoolympics events. Thank you to the Human Resources Department who, for the last three years, have been great in showing their appreciation to the keepers through hats, happy hours, lunches, and support. Thank you John Kling and Carmi Penny for supplying the great Zoolympic prizes. I promise not to let anyone know how nice you really are. And to everyone at the Zoo and WAP that shared our week by going to the game, helping in the tent, and letting us have more fun than usual...***thank you!*** We are all dependent on each other to make what we do achievable. Thanks to all of you for your support and hard work!

If you would like to learn more about SD AAZK, visit our website at www.sdaazk.org.

For information about AAZK and a career in zoo keeping, please visit www.aazk.org.

National Zoo Keeper Week at the WAP

by Cammy Muirhead, WAP Mammal Keeper

NZKW week began with a kickoff breakfast and slide show of animal care employees. Following speeches from Gary Priest, Adam Ringler, and Tim Mulligan, we moved on to play a series of fun games in which almost everyone won prizes. On Tuesday, we received discount tickets to the Padres game which, even though the Padres have less than a stellar record, everyone still had fun! Wednesday made the week relaxing with a happy hour at On The Border which received several good compliments from all who attended.

Guests who sauntered through the animal care center walkway were greeted with live animals provided by Animal Behavior and several tables exhibiting the various aspects of animal care. The variety went from what happens in the hospital, to the hands-on aspects of being a mammal keeper, the unique skills of the Bird Department, to the importance of enrichment. Twice that week we also had Adopt an Animal selling adoptions and raising funds for our vast animal programs, and a special enrichment making table where guests could make enrichment and watch it be distributed. A special thanks goes out to those who volunteered to man the tables for guest interaction.

The first annual Keeper Olympics ran throughout the week. Each day we held two events and keepers competed individually for their teams receiving prizes and points for each event. Beginning on Monday, we had the Truck Load Relay and Read Those Notches as our kick off events. On Tuesday, we held a pot luck for the Mammal Department plus Stuff That Pellet Bag and Train Your Keeper; both events provided lots of great entertainment! Wednesday's events were Carrot Toss and Water Balloon Toss. Thursday was Count Those Animals and Three Legged Race. Friday was our wrap up day, and we had Back That Trailer Son and our Zooper Keeper Relay.

The week provided excitement, healthy competition, teamwork, morale uplift, and lots of new stories to laugh about. ***Thanks to everyone who made this wonderful week possible!***

San Diego's National Zoo Keeper Week (*continued*)

Comments from the San Diego Zoo's Board of Trustees to keepers

Dear San Diego zoo keepers:

In light of this being Keeper Week, it is a fitting time to say **thank you** for all that you do for both the animals and the organization. You are a group of committed professionals and it is continually evident as I walk both the Zoo and the Park and see first hand your dedication to your charges.

My husband and I were fortunate to witness the transfer of the WAP elephants to the Zoo. I was so proud to be affiliated with this wonderful organization. The planning and dedication that was exhibited by each keeper as they worked with the elephants to bring them into their new surroundings was heartwarming. Obviously it was a big success as we all continue to witness how comfortable the elephants are in their new surroundings.

I realize this is only one example of your combined skill and talents. Regardless of what species you are working with, each of you have that same commitment and concern for both the smallest and the largest animals.

Thank you for all that you do for us, you are a major reason that we are the "World Famous San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park."

Warm regards,
Berit Durler, President, Board of Trustees

Please pass my congratulations on to your keepers.

They have done a terrific service for all zoos and all animals in those zoos by founding the AZKA group. They should be very proud of their accomplishment. I hope their meeting here in San Diego is successful and will be fun for all concerned. They did get a terrific San Diego weather window.

Fred Frye

I spent yesterday afternoon at the Zoo, proudly sporting my brand new "San Diego Zoo Keeper" t-shirt, but I must not have projected the right image as not one person asked if I was a real keeper. I live vicariously through them! We're "world famous" for our collections and exhibits, but without our dedicated keepers who are so devoted to "their" charges, we couldn't be better than mediocre. It's so fun to see and hear their passion when they're talking to guests or the animals!

Equally impressive is the fact that our keepers founded AAZK and have taken it to much higher levels with their dedication and ideas. We are so fortunate that they chose us and I hope you'll share with them how much we all appreciate their efforts, dedication, and professionalism.

Regards,
Judy Wheatley

Please express to the keepers my appreciation for all they do to make us great!

Sincerely,
Weldon Donaldson

Letter from a volunteer

I volunteered on Tuesday, July 21 in the keeper tent. It was such a pleasure working with our zoo keepers. They have so much knowledge and are willing to share their information with all our guests. It was a great day and I enjoyed every minute of it. I would like to thank them for doing such a great job and for the time spent with them.

Gloria Hanson, volunteer 3-1/2 years

San Diego's National Zoo Keeper Week (*continued*)

From the Zoo's newsletter *Zoo View* (August 2009)

EMPLOYEE NEWS: NATIONAL ZOO KEEPER WEEK: Thanks for all you do!

From July 19 to 25 we celebrated our zoo keepers.

Festivities included a breakfast at the Wild Animal Park and lunch at the Zoo, a special bird show at Hunte Amphitheater, a night at the Padres baseball game, happy hours in San Diego and Escondido and booths at the Zoo and Wild Animal Park to share our keepers' stories with our guests.

A portion of the National Zoo Keeper Week Proclamation states: To help increase public awareness about the need to preserve our precious habitats and the animals which inhabit them and to recognize the roles that zoo keepers play in animal conservation and education, the American Association of Zoo Keepers invites all AAZK chapters to participate in National Zoo Keeper Week.

We are proud to celebrate the zoo keepers who care for the animals at our Zoo, Wild Animal Park, and other facilities.

Thank you!

Additional Zoo Keeper Week photos are posted on the ZSSD Intranet.

Keeper kudos

Panda narrator Ellie Rosenbaum wrote a post about pandas in the Web site's blog section. In it she mentioned National Zoo Keeper Week. Her post received dozens of comments from readers thanking not only panda keepers but all keepers.

Comments posted on the Zoo's blog site

Kudos to all zoo keepers around the world for the outstanding, loving care they provide the animals they watch, and for their conservation efforts and the education provided to all of us to make our world a better habitat for both humans and animals. - Margaret from Virginia

Thanks **very** much to each and every zoo keeper! The care you all give to **all** the animals is apparent from the moment visitors walk through the entrance! Nearly every time we have visited the Zoo, we've been able to receive answers to any and every question we've had. - Bobbie

Happy Zoo Keeper Week! You take care of our babies, so you are the greatest! Hope you are having a magical week! I say every day..."peace and love and no suffering to the animals..." thank you zoo keepers for being a big part of that. - Kat W

Happy National Zoo Keeper Week to everyone who takes such amazing and loving care of our furry friends!! You do such incredible work—here's hoping you are having a great week. It must be very rewarding to work at such an amazing zoo—and have exciting times ahead with the impending birth of a baby panda (fingers crossed) and polar cub (more fingers crossed). I know I am beyond excited—and find that the first thing I do when I turn on my laptop is check the Zoo cams and blogs to find out how my friends are doing. You are like family now—and I just can't go a day without checking in on everyone! - Cheryl

To all the Zoo staff: Happy Zoo Keeper Week. You all rock...big time! All of you in the all the zoos do a terrific job, and we are so lucky to have all of you on the job. A great big "Thank You." - Dianne in Texas

Happy Zoo Keeper Week to all the fantastic zoo keepers worldwide. You are the best. I can't imagine the amount of poop you have had to shovel over the years, and we think our jobs are bad. You have my admiration. - Lisa

Happy Zoo Keeper Week to the hardest working group of people in the state. We know the job is much, much more than just playing with the animals. There is a degree of responsibility there that is way beyond what most people would think. Thank you all for your hard work, your love for these animals and the care you give them. - Peggy

San Diego's National Zoo Keeper Week (*continued*)

From Bringing Zoo Good News

I worked the tent and all the keepers were so knowledgeable and accessible to the public. This was supposed to be "their week" and they put in extra time to share with others. I also worked the Zoolympics and it was so much fun. With a lot of hard work from Yvette and Matt. We mostly had keepers from SeaWorld and they really seemed to enjoy themselves despite the heat. It was nice to see the cross cooperation with the two separate parks. The zoo keepers who participated also seem to have a lot of fun. Hopefully, next year's Zoolympics will be even bigger. I would also like to thank all the keepers who come by the enrichment shed, either to join in or care for nearby animals, for their friendliness and willingness to share information about their particular specialties. I have been volunteering for a long time, and the opportunities we volunteers are offered to help out the Society just keep getting better. I am sooooo proud to be part of this program. – Linda Otterness, a Zoo volunteer

Zoological Society of San Diego's press release

ZOO KEEPER THANK YOU: SPECIAL ACTIVITIES PLANNED, JULY 19-25

Zoos and aquariums across the nation are celebrating a very special group of people: keepers and animal care staff. Participate in National Zoo Keeper Week (NZKW), held July 19-25 at the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, by meeting keepers up close.

It's a rare opportunity to meet someone who has turned their passion into a career. Not always glamorous, the calling of Zoo and Wild Animal Park keepers may require them to work early, stay late, and work weekends and holidays. These people unconditionally care for their animals as if they were their own children 365 days a year. On their days off, they continue to be committed to conservation and research. The more than 6,000 men and women that make up this group nationally are crucial voices for endangered species and habitat loss.

During NZKW, zoos and aquariums get the chance to give these dedicated professionals the "thank you" that animals never could. Helping in their cause for conservation is the biggest appreciation that animal specialists can receive, and the first step is through public awareness.

The Zoo and Wild Animal Park have special events planned throughout the week. Educational tables will be set up between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. daily where guests can talk with and ask questions of keepers working in veterinary services, mammals, birds, elephants and behavior divisions. An enrichment-making station and individuals from the Adopt an Animal program will also be available to help teach about the importance of enrichment items for the critters. Photo Caravan riders at the Wild Animal Park will get an exclusive look into what it means to be a keeper, while special animal feedings at the Zoo and Park will allow visitors to see keepers in action.

"We are proud to have zoo keepers recognized for the important work they do on behalf of wildlife and conservation," said Shane Good, president of the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK).

AAZK will also be holding a fund-raiser at Cold Stone Creamery all week. Part of the proceeds from customers presenting a flier will go to AAZK. Fliers are valid at two locations, San Marcos and Mission Valley, and can be found on the Zoo's Web site www.sandiegozoo.org.

The San Diego Zoo is a supporter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers. AAZK is a nonprofit volunteer organization made up of professional zoo keepers and other interested persons dedicated to professional animal care and conservation. Its mission is to advance excellence in the zoo keeping profession, foster effective communication beneficial to animal care, support deserving conservation projects, and promote the preservation of natural resources and animal life. For more information, visit www.aazk.org.

The 100-acre San Diego Zoo is dedicated to the conservation of endangered species and their habitats. The organization focuses on conservation and research work around the globe, educates millions of individuals a year about wildlife and maintains accredited horticultural, animal, library and photo collections. The Zoo also manages the 1,800-acre San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, which includes a 900-acre native species reserve, and the San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research. The important conservation and science work of these entities is supported in part by The Foundation of the Zoological Society of San Diego.

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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

Entertainment books—call (619)231-1515, x4672 to order your copy today. Sale ends in December.

December—TBA. Stay tuned to our [web site](#).

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

February 21–24, 2010 International Association of Giraffe Care Professionals—Phoenix, AZ. Visit www.giraffecare.org for information.

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

April 25–30, 2010 Animal Behavior Management Alliance Annual Conference: “Defining a Decade: Animal Management—Past, Present and Future”—Pittsburgh, PA. Details at www.theabma.org.

August 22–26, 2010 National AAZK Conference—hosted by Philadelphia chapter of AAZK. Info at www.philadelphiaaazk.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, to find out more about upcoming events!