



To promote and establish good relationships among professional zoo keepers.

To promote and establish a means to stimulate incentive and greater interest in the zoo keeping profession.

To support deserving conservation projects that include educating the general public about the need for preserving our natural resources and animal life through these worthwhile efforts.

To establish materials beneficial to zoo keeper education.

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| | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| President's Message | 1 |
| Mexican Gray Wolf | 2 |
| Emperors of Ice | 3 |
| Clapper Rail Recovery | 4 |
| Kobey's Swap Meet | 5 |
| Zoo Keeper Week | 7 |

| | |
|---------------|----------|
| Events | 8 |
|---------------|----------|

The Keeper

The American Association of Zoo Keepers San Diego Chapter Quarterly Newsletter – Fall 2011

President's Message

By Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK President



After years of planning, it is finally here! The 2011 National AAZK Conference in San Diego is happening August 24th through the 28th.

We are at the point where we are tying things up and working on the details. And there are a lot of details. Thanks to a great group of people, we will have a wonderful conference.

Each committee member has been working tirelessly through piles of information. I know it would all be impossible without their dedication to this event. So much has been going on, especially these last few months. I would like to thank each one of them for their time and hard work. If you don't know who they are, they are easily identified by that tired look, extra grays and wrinkles, and nervous smiles on their face. Oh, and the computer and phone connected to their bodies. Everyone has been great.

The funny part is, as much work as it has been, I truly have to say that most of us have enjoyed it. There is nothing like the giddiness you get over picking the color of a shirt or deciding on conference extras. It seemed like the little things were the most enlightening. Yes, there have been moments of frustration and endless meetings, but overall it has been a good experience. One in which all of us will be able to take away lessons we have learned. Lessons learned not just about putting the conference together but improving our people skills and discovering business needs.

You still have the opportunity to join us on this adventure, either by participating in the conference as a delegate or as a volunteer. I am sure there is something we need help with.

What will we do after the conference? Well, we'll sigh a big relief then get back to the business of San Diego AAZK. With our new skills, our chapter and events will be better than before. Meanwhile, we hope to see you during the conference! And thanks for your help and support.

The Future of the Mexican Gray Wolf

By Kevin Schmelzlen, Conservation Associate, CA Wolf Center

The endangered Mexican wolf received a much-needed boost to its population in April 2011 as four pups (two males and two females) were born at the California Wolf Center in Julian, CA. The pups have now been given their initial medical examinations, microchips, and vaccinations. All of the pups are healthy and in good condition. They have been assigned their official Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) stud book numbers: f1226, f1227, m1228 and m1229.

The Mexican wolf (*Canis lupus baileyi*) is one of the rarest land mammals in the world, with fewer than 50 individuals in the wild and about 350 in the global population. Since 1997, the

California Wolf Center (CWC) has played an important role in the Mexican Wolf SSP, a bi-national captive breeding program that supports the reintroduction of the highly endangered Mexican gray wolf into the wild. The California Wolf Center participates in the Mexican Wolf SSP as a breeding facility, currently hosting sixteen endangered Mexican wolves. The Center is one of the largest institutions hosting Mexican wolves in the world.



The four new pups at our facility, along with a litter of pups at the Endangered Wolf Center in Missouri, are taking part in groundbreaking research. Now in the safety testing phase, this research is aimed at lowering the pup mortality rate in the wild, which currently stands between forty and sixty percent. We hope that if we are able to find out more information on the everyday lives of wolf pups, we can figure out the impact of different possible causes of pup mortality and work to limit the effects of those causes. Each one of our pups is fitted with a lightweight, color-coded expandable radio collar, which, in the wild, would be used to help track the movement of the pups. Currently, only wolves six months of age or older wear radio collars because existing designs are too large for young pups.

Since we are involved in the safety testing phase of the pup radio collar research project, all four of the pups need to be seen at least twice a day to verify that they are tolerating the collars well. This is harder than it sounds because the pups are very skittish around humans (which is good news since they are potential release candidates), and they are still small enough to easily move around through the bushes in the enclosure. We are always on the lookout for any missing collars or signs that the pups, or their parents, may have tampered with the collars. Since we try to keep the wolves at the California Wolf Center from getting too habituated to humans, and since disease is a cause for concern, CWC staff attempt to get a good look at the pups and their radio collars from outside the enclosures first. If we are not able to see the pups from outside the enclosure, staff members will put on designated jumpsuits and boots cleaned with bleach solution and will go into the enclosure in a “buddy system” to get a better vantage point. While the pups run around the enclosure to avoid being seen by staff, the parents of the litter, M863 and F1046, typically huff-bark and mock-charge at the humans to give extra incentive for us to hurry up and leave the pack alone. This normal protective behavior is a great reminder of how important our safety protocols are whenever we’re working around the animals.

Although performing a visual pup collar check twice a day can be challenging, California Wolf Center and its staff are very proud to be taking part in this important research project. The Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan is arguably the most crucial component of wolf conservation currently taking place in North America, and California Wolf Center is grateful to have the opportunity to make an even greater impact than we already have as a captive breeding facility.

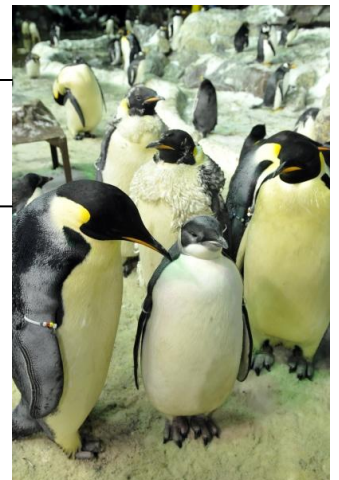
For more information on our facility, or to learn how to donate, volunteer, or become a member, go to www.CaliforniaWolfCenter.org, or find us on Facebook under “California Wolf Center.”



Emperors of the Ice

By Linda Henry, SeaWorld San Diego

Winter twilight has descended upon the Antarctic. The sun is below the horizon and it is emperor breeding season. Emperor penguins breed during the long Antarctic winter enduring some of the harshest weather conditions on the planet. Eggs are incubated on the feet of the males for about 65 days while females are fattening themselves at sea before returning to feed chicks after they hatch.



It is a process that has been repeated annually by emperor penguins for thousands of years. And this cycle is little changed inside the Penguin Encounter at SeaWorld. Starting in late March the emperors begin breeding behaviors, choosing mates by the end of May and laying their single egg by early July. The females transfer their egg to their mates within a few hours following lay. After accepting the egg, the males are moved into a corral inside the penguin exhibit. Incubating males are corralled in order to safeguard the egg from mishaps or being stolen by other curious males.

The incubation will continue until September when the first eggs are expected to hatch. (Last year's chick, now a juvenile, will be turning one year on September 12). Stop by the Penguin Encounter to experience the Antarctic winter and see the males incubating their eggs.



Collaborative Efforts Aid Light-footed Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris levipes*) Recovery

By Laurie Conrad, SeaWorld San Diego

The clapper rail recovery program is a partnership between SeaWorld San Diego, the Chula Vista Nature Center and the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park, along with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Navy, the California Department of Fish and Game and independent wildlife biologists. Cooperative captive breeding efforts were initiated in 1998 as part of a light-footed clapper rail propagation protocol to combat genetic bottlenecking in wild rail populations. Tuesday, July 19, 2011 marked the 300th bird released as part of a 10-year breeding program administered by the partners.



The light-footed clapper rail is one of the most endangered coastal birds in California. In the early 1900s, light-footed clapper rails were common residents in southern California marshlands, but the species has become endangered due to loss of coastal wetland habitats due to degradation and development. Studies suggest detrimental demographic and genetic effects, attributed to habitat fragmentation, may hamper recovery of the species.

The focus of the breeding activity is to increase genetic diversity in isolated and fragmented populations by producing and releasing birds derived from a genetically desirable population through a captive breeding program. The program has successfully bred wild-captured rail pairs since 2001. Both parent and artificial incubation/hand-rearing techniques were used in the combined years to fledge offspring which were released into habitats that have been identified as rail habitat with depressed populations.

Annual surveys indicate that the introduction of zoologically-bred birds and other conservation efforts are paying off. Wild rail populations are at their highest level since yearly censuses were begun in the 1980s. The population has grown from as few as 142 pairs in 1985, to at least 424 today.



Kobey's Swap Meet

By Laurie Brogan, San Diego Zoo Sr Bird Keeper, SD AAZK Board Member

As always, it was too early and dark to be there, but a group of crazy souls showed up at the Sports Arena Kobey's Swap Meet for our bi-annual AAZK swap-meet fundraiser! This year, along with Hali O'Connor, Crystal Schalmo, Lisa Bryant, Jackie Williams, and myself, we were lucky to have 4 volunteers with us: Brittney Hitchman, Madison Smith, Sam Nelson, and Debra Crespin.

The Zoo's RB Warehouse donated their charity items and fellow employees, neighbors, friends, and family brought us their goods so we could raise money to go towards the upcoming conference.

Believe it or not, one of the hardest parts of setting-up for the swap-meet is trying to unload our items while keeping fellow swap meet vendors away. Luckily we have improved our system and with the help of the volunteers, we were able to keep them at bay until we were ready.

Once again the weather was to our advantage this day. It was overcast and cool most of the morning, turning into a partly sunny afternoon. This kept the crowds very steady all day long, which actually makes it easier on us.

As we get near our "closing time," we begin the sales. A very popular one is the fill-a-bag marathon! We usually start at \$5 and basically you get a bag and fill it with as much as you possibly can. Gradually the price is reduced to \$2 per bag. It is amazing what people will take. We always let them know who we are and what we do. We even have our regulars that come looking for us. They all know AAZK is supporting a good cause; be it for habitat conservation or keeper education.

Our profit this time? Just over \$1,000.00! Truly one of our better outings thanks to everyone that helped. Sam, Madison, Debra, and Brittney were just great! And even those folks that couldn't make the actual event, but helped go through the storage unit, collected, donated, and picked-up items help. It's a group effort and everyone's assistance is what makes it a successful fundraiser.

All the money we raised will go towards our 2011 National AAZK Conference. And I cannot believe it is almost here! We are still looking to raise more funds, so if you have any ideas, PLEASE let us know.



How We Celebrated National Zoo Keeper Week 2011

This was the 5th annual celebration of National Zoo Keeper Week, July 17 – 23. Keepers from various organizations in San Diego celebrated in their own way, but keepers at the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park were able to spend time with each other and guests during this week dedicated to them.

Keepers from the zoo spent time in the Keeper Tent, speaking with guests and encouraging future keepers. Thanks to all the keepers who participated and spent time out of their busy schedule to be there. It is always great to see how excited people get when speaking with “real keepers.”

The human resources department hosted a Happy Hour for the Zoo and Park keepers, which is always a big hit. It is a great time for keepers to relax and hang out with friends, while doing one of their favorite things: eat free food! We are so easy to please. Thanks to Tim Mulligan for arranging the happy hours for both parks.

The Zoo keepers also were treated to a pizza lunch and opportunities to win prizes. After 3 raffles, a keeper trivia contest, water balloon toss, and a jello eating contest, gift cards were distributed to the winners. Thanks to John Kling and Carmi Penny for the Visa gift cards and to the food services department for the sodas. All items were greatly appreciated!

One of the highlights of Keeper Week actually happened the week after. On July 26th representatives from the San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, SeaWorld, CA Wolf Center, Chula Vista Nature Center, Project Wildlife, San Diego River Park Foundation, and SEALIFE Aquarium went to PetCo Park to go on the field and be recognized for their work and dedication to conservation. And we weren't alone out there! Trainers and handlers from the Zoo and Park brought a cheetah, 2 servals, a harpy eagle, a binturong, a milky eagle owl, and a jungle nymph (a very large mantis). And of course Clifford the cheetah's dog was there too.

And there was more! Stacy Conery from the Zoo's Elephant Odyssey area did a wonderful job of singing the national anthem. Then Joan Embery started the game by throwing the first pitch. It was keepers all around and everyone looked fabulous!



Stay tuned for more NZKW information in the next few months. Even though National Zoo Keeper Week has past, SeaWorld and the Zoo will be offering exchanged tours to keepers at each facility. Since Keeper Week is held during high season at each place, we decided we would wait until after summer to exchange visiting tours. We'll keep you posted.

Hoped you all enjoyed National Zoo Keeper Week as much as we did. Be sure to mark it down on your calendar for next year – it's the 3rd week in July.

If you want to see the pictures, be sure to visit our Facebook page on our website at www.sdaazk.org. Very fun!



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CALENDAR 2011 visit www.sdaazk.org for updates

- **2011 National AAZK Conference hosted by SD AAZK.** August 24-28, at the Westin Gaslamp Hotel.
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- **October 6-9, 2011: Advancing Bear Care Conference** in Banff, Canada. Hikes into bear habitat for interpretation and workshop. Information at: <http://sdaazk.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/BearConference-2011.pdf>
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- **Stay tuned for upcoming events!**

