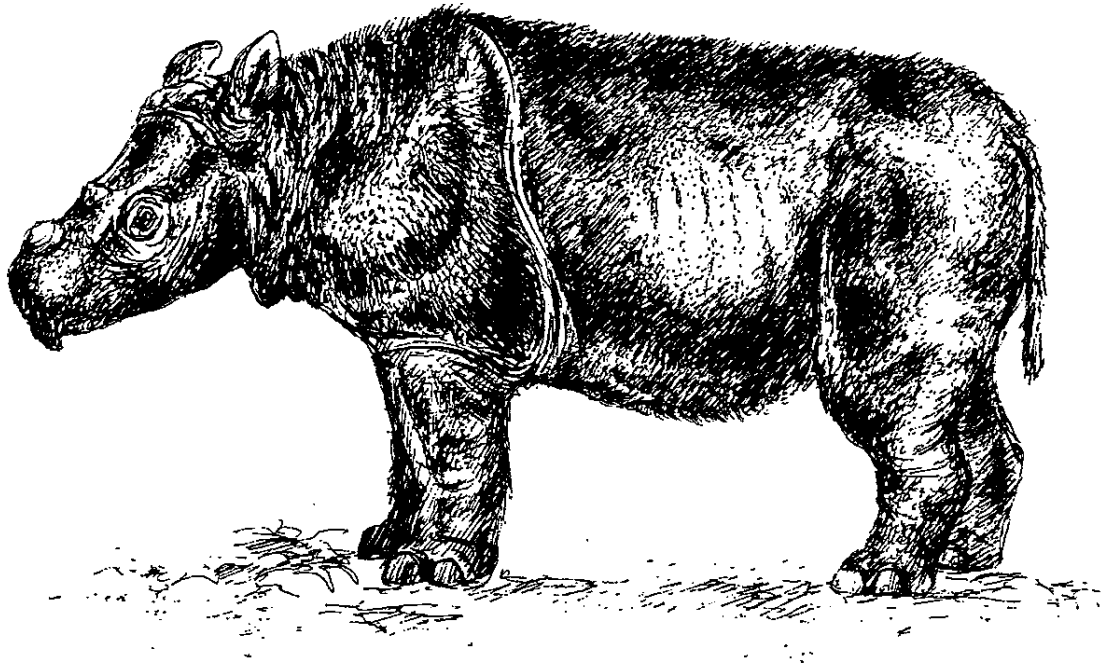


THE ZOO'S ROLE IN CONSERVATION



Sumatran rhinoceros

notes

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EDUCATION SERVICE

ZOO

The slogan of Zoos SA is “we exist to save animals from extinction”.

There are three ways in which Zoos SA achieves this aim:

1. By actively supporting the conservation of Threatened Species populations and their natural habitat.

Zoos SA participates in international breeding programs of 65 species of threatened animals.

Examples of these programs include Golden-Lion Tamarin, Red Panda, Addax and Cheetah. These species are endangered or critically endangered, due to threats currently operating in their natural habitats. Because it is not safe to return these animals to the wild at this stage, “insurance populations” are kept in captivity in Zoos and Parks in the Australasian region. An ASMP (Australasian Species Management Plan) is prepared for each of these species to manage the breeding and exchange of animals between zoos in the region.

This plan aims to maintain a high degree of genetic diversity in the captive population.

For many native threatened species, Zoos SA works in partnership with Department for Environment and Heritage and others to breed and reintroduce animals to wild locations where the species once lived. Release sites must be suitable, eg. free of introduced species such as foxes, cats, rabbits and goats, which will hunt or compete for food and shelter with the animals being released. Zoos SA staff are part of the group involved in this work too.

Animals which have been bred for release must not be “humanised”, so the breeding process must be very “hands-off.” Young animals are hardened for release by being put into larger, more open enclosures where they must find the food themselves, and learn how to find shelter and avoid predators.

When they are released they carry a radio collar or implant so their progress can be monitored for at least a year. If they do not survive, causes of death are examined and this knowledge will lead to more success in later releases.

Some species bred by Zoos SA and successfully released to the wild are Bilby, Yellow-Footed Rock-Wallaby, Brush-Tailed Rock-Wallaby, Eastern Barred Bandicoot, Mallee Fowl, Stick Nest Rat, Brush-Tailed Bettong, Black-Flanked Rock-Wallaby, Woma Python and Orange-Bellied Parrot.

2. By offering support and facilities to increase scientific knowledge that will benefit conservation. For example:

The Zoos SA assists the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) to genetically manage their captive-breeding program of many species. For example, the Greater Stick-Nest Rat has bred using a pedigree database developed by the zoo industry. With this system it has been possible to breed over 650 Stick-Nest Rats from 19 original animals with virtually no in-breeding.

The Royal Zoological Society of South Australia offers a number of scholarships each year to university students who are researching animals for Honours or PhD degrees. The students generally conduct their research in the wild and gain new knowledge about animal species. This knowledge is shared and can assist government and community groups to make informal decisions about land use and conservation programs.

Zoos SA staff travel to countries such as Philippines, India, New Guinea, Brazil and Mauritius to share their knowledge of good animal management (nutrition, breeding, enclosure design, record keeping etc.) with local workers who are involved in vital conservation work with native species in their countries.

Zoos SA staff members support fieldwork, such as population counts, that are directly related to conservation. Some animal counts which staff have been involved in include the Mallee Fowl, Hooded Plover and Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat.

3. By promoting an increase in public and political awareness of the necessity for conservation. For example:

Zoo graphics such as signs and interpretative centres provide valuable information. Signs outside enclosures give the name, appearance, biology and behaviour of each species and their status in the wild. Some signs provide more detailed information about conservation programs and research.

Education is an essential conservation task of Zoos SA. Our education programs for school students include highlighting the plight of animals in the wild and their needs for survival. Using the animals and Zoo grounds as tools they encourage students to participate in actions to assist in the conservation of Threatened Species. Planetkeeper programs enable students to not only learn a great deal about the threats to a particular threatened species, but they empower the students to raise community awareness about the animals and to fundraise to support conservation work that is happening “in the wild” for these species.

Zoo guides, the Information Centre volunteers and the Zookeepers are another valuable source of information on conservation matters concerning the animals in the Society’s collection.

These are only a few examples of Zoos SA’s involvement in local, regional and international conservation projects. You can become actively involved with the Zoos SA by becoming a member of the Royal Zoological Society of South Australia or by adopting an animal.

Contact Zoos SA for more details.

