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The American Association of Zoo Keepers
 San Diego Chapter's
 Quarterly Newsletter—Spring 2006

Message from the President

By Robert Cisneros, SD AAZK President

There is no secret handshake. There is nothing mysterious about being on the board of directors of your local chapter of AAZK. Your current officers, like previous members, are animal care professionals with a strong desire to provide continued support in professional development. They are supporters of conservation, raising funds for worthy conservation projects and they help educate the public about the need to save our wildlife and their habitat. They sell t-shirts at Kobey's Swap Meet, run silent auctions at Wine Steals, organize Bowling For Rhinos, put together workshops, organize this newsletter, and network with conservationists.

The qualifications for being a board member are simple. You must be a member of both local and national AAZK. Energy and enthusiasm are also good qualifications. This is an opportunity to make changes and help influence our professional development. Serving as a board member or just playing an active role in our local chapter can enhance your personal development as a zoo keeper. Our roles as animal care providers are constantly changing; it is a time for us to be constructive, creative, and progressive. What's your role?

In the 1960s, when Bob Dylan wrote "The times, they are a changin'," it was an exhortation for people to embrace the desire for change, to not stonewall its progress, but rather contribute to its course and speed. Since I first started as a keeper here 13 years ago, I have seen our roles change significantly in how we care for our animals. Operant conditioning and training have been added to our job description, we have begun to formalize how we enrich our animals, and we now play more active roles in conservation. I think our job descriptions are a work-in-progress. I also feel that as keepers, we set the pace for how we care for our animals. Consider the kind of strides that have made in training animals in the last ten years. JoAnne Simerson has pioneered the way we incorporate training and operant conditioning with all kinds of animals. Consider the strides made in enrichment. Yvette Kemp and Suzanne Ferror are working hard to lay the groundwork for a formalized enrichment program. Bridget Mulholland, Maureen Duryee, and other animal care professionals at the Zoo and Park are writing blogs, informing readers around the world about our profession and the animals we care for.

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Speaking of professional development and around the world, San Diego AAZK has entered its bid to host the 3rd International Congress on Zookeeping and national AAZK joint conference to be held in 2009. This type of conference will bring keepers from around the world to San Diego, some from underdeveloped countries. This will truly be a unique opportunity for professional growth, development, and fellowship with keepers from all around the globe. Houston, Woodland Park, and San Francisco are also vying for the honor as the first to host this international conference on American soil. Should San Diego win the bid, we will definitely be looking for help in organizing this once-in-a-lifetime event!

The times, they are a changing...contribute to its course and speed.

“The Art & Science of Training” Steve Martin, Natural Encounter, Inc.

By Robert Cisneros, SD AAZK President

Steve Martin was preaching to the choir when he spoke at December’s AAZK talk entitled “The Art and Science of Training.” Although it was not necessary to convert or convince the more than 80 animal care professionals in attendance, his message was absorbed and well-received as if hearing it for the very first time.

Not to be confused with that “wild and crazy” guy of Hollywood fame, animal behaviorist-trainer Steve Martin is the President of Natural Encounters Inc., a company dedicated to animal training and visitor experience. In 1971, Steve Martin established a unique bird show at the San Diego Zoo’s Wild Animal Park, using non-traditional, free-flight birds to help convey an inspiring conservation message. His innovative program was the first of its kind, making it distinctive from all other bird shows. In 1991, Steve Martin established Natural Encounters, Inc., using the natural behavior of animals to engage, inspire, and empower audiences around the country.

Steve’s presentation was a summary of his philosophy of using skill and imagination to produce consistent and cooperative animal behavior. When it comes to animal training, art and science, Martin explains, are not mutually exclusive. The combination, according to Martin, helps establish a two-way communication between trainer and animal. The following is a summary of his presentation.

TRAINING

“Not everyone endorses this,” said Steve Martin in his opening statement. “Some feel that training takes the wild away from the animals or that it in some way disrespects them.” Training, however, takes place regardless of whether a formal training program has been established. Animal caregivers have always been involved with training, according to Martin. For example, if an animal is shown a net or hose to get it to shift from one enclosure to the next, it learns to shift whenever the net is presented. Animals respond to what is reinforced, whether positive or negative. Martin continued, “The best animal trainers are the ones who accept responsibility for their animals’ undesirable behavior.” Instead of asking, “Why is the animal behaving this way”, the trainer should ask, “What is reinforcing this behavior?”

TWO WAY COMMUNICATION

The best training occurs when there is an exchange of information between animal and trainer resulting in the achievement of something desirable. Honesty is an important factor, according to Martin. “Be honest with your animals, give them what you offer. If you ask your animal to do a behavior, reinforce the behavior when he performs it.” Steve commented that animals quickly adjust to situations where coaxing is used to elicit a response (but failed to reinforce).

Steve further discussed the details of two-way communication. Beginning with trainer to animal communications:

- cue (signal discriminator or SD)
- prompt (anything other than the cue); baits and lures are a type of prompt
- never give more than 3 prompts: prevent behaviors from becoming prompt-dependent
- bridging stimulus or bridge (the sound or action that tells the animal that the job is done correctly)

Then, animal to trainer communication:

- body language; it is important for the trainer to be able to read his animal

MOTIVATION

What’s in it for me? When evaluating animal behavior, it is important to ask yourself what is the motivation for that behavior,” elaborated Martin. “Evaluate from the animal’s perspective...animals are always going towards something or away from something.” Martin continued by saying that the best training strategies are ones where the animal wants to perform the task.

What are some of the influences on motivation? Steve Martin listed the following as key elements:

- relationship with the trainer (is it based on negative or positive experiences?)

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“Training,” continued...

(Continued from page 2)

- confidence or ability to perform the behavior
- past experience (this is important but does not define who the animal is today)
- natural influences (social, breeding, comfort, height, etc.)
- hunger state—this is the last thing you should do. Some trainers make this their first tool. There are better ways to train animals. Good relationships work best. Making hunger state an influence on the animal’s motivation should be the last resort for the trainer.

ANIMAL TRAINING TIPS

There are many factors that will influence the success of animal training. “Be sensitive to body language and be aware of personal space,” Martin reiterated. Equally important is setting the animal up to succeed; knowing what the animal is capable of doing is very important here. “Arrange the environment to limit distractions,” continued Martin. Other tips included:

- working at the animal’s pace
- repetition builds confidence
- give animals power to change their environment
- use a short window of opportunity

ASK EMPOWERING QUESTIONS

How does it apply to behavior of that species in the wild? Does the animal have any hard-wired or innate behaviors that are self-reinforcing? Answering these questions may provide an understanding for some of the actions seen and also provide insight enabling a better strategy for shaping the behavior.

TRAINING

When it comes to training, Steve Martin emphasized the role of the trainer. If an animal is not successfully learning a behavior, perhaps it is a reflection on the teacher, not the student. Martin explained, “There is no doubt that the animal is capable of learning the behavior. The only question is, can the trainer teach it?” Martin continued by providing some helpful definitions for training:

The ABCs of training

1. Antecedent—conditions that set the occasion for the behavior to occur
2. Behavior—anything an animal does that is observable
3. Consequence—events that occur immediately after the behavior

Reinforcement

- o the process of providing something an animal likes that increases the future frequency of a response
- o a reinforcer is the consequence that immediately follows a behavior that serves to increase or maintain that behavior
- o there is no such thing as a reinforcer that does not work

Reinforcers increase behavior

- o by being presented (positive reinforcer)
- o by being taken away (negative reinforcer)

Steve Martin next posed a question to the audience. “How would you train a chicken to run across the room, jump into a basket, and stay there for 30 seconds using positive reinforcement?” The answers varied. Some suggested training the chicken to stay in the basket first, then approximating the running behavior. After several ideas were exchanged, Martin then asked, “How would you train the same behavior using negative reinforcement?” Again, a plethora of possibilities rang from the audience. Some solutions included chasing the chicken or hosing the floor. “When using negative reinforcement, be sure to use positive reinforcement,” added Martin.

(Continued on page 4)

“Training,” continued...

(Continued from page 3)

“There are detrimental side affects of negative reinforcement,” continued Martin.

- escape/avoidance behavior
- increased aggression
- apathy/generalized reduction or decrease in behavior
- phobias and irrational fear of the environment

“Negative Reinforcement and punishment are so similar,” qualified Martin. “But there are problems with punishment,” he continued.

- it is too often confused with retribution
- too often associated with anger and aggression
- often used absentmindedly and without question
- it works...and therefore reinforcing to the person doing the punishing

Punishment, according to Martin, should only be used in an environment with the opportunity to succeed. There is another way that we can decrease undesirable behaviors without the use of punishment. “You can use a differential reinforcement of incompatible behaviors (DRI) to decrease unwanted behavior,” added Martin. “With a DRI, we can reinforce behavior that is incompatible with the undesired behavior.”

Steve Martin’s presentation was well attended and well received. His talk was not just food for thought, but a quiet exhortation for all of us play an active role in the training and conditioning of our animals. No matter what you are doing, says Martin, you are always involved in the training of your animals regardless of whether a formal training program has been established. As a final thought, Martin concluded by saying that training is enriching to the animal’s mind.

San Diego AAZK would like to thank Steve Martin for taking time from his busy schedule so that he could present to our members and guests. In addition, AAZK would like to thank Steve and Natural Encounters, Inc for making a generous donation of \$325.00, matching what we raised that day through our silent auction. AAZK also thanks Collections, Husbandry, and Science for providing some of the refreshments, reinforcing those who attended. AAZK would like to also thank Yvette Kemp, SD AAZK Vice President for procuring such a motivational and informative speaker. Special thanks to Matt Akel for setting up another successful silent auction and to Laurie Brogan for being so diligent about helping members with their renewals.



“The Principles & Philosophy of Animal Handling” Mark Johnson, DVM, Global Wildlife Resources

By Robert Cisneros, SD AAZK President

On January 17, 2006, Mark Johnson, DVM, of Global Wildlife Resources, explained that the philosophy of animal restraint can be reduced to a simple presupposition, according to Mark Johnson. “You are always playing an active role. You are either standing in their sun or standing in their shade,” explained Johnson. Mark spoke to a group of 35 animal care professionals about the principles and philosophy of animal restraint at last January’s AAZK 3:00 talk.

His credentials make him an expert in his field. Mark was the project veterinarian during the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone and Idaho. He continues to provide support, when needed, to the recovery programs there. Dr. Johnson is also the primary author for the *Field Operations Manual for USDA Wildlife Services*. He is the Founder and Executive Director of Global Wildlife Resources and teaches wildlife handling courses to wildlife biologists and university students. Through his expertise, he has provided assistance in the capture and restraint of feral canids in the Caribbean and Hurricane-struck Gulf Coast.

“What is the highest goal of wildlife handling,” asked Johnson. “When it comes to animal restraint, your highest goal is to never have to handle the animal.” Johnson elaborated by saying that there are alternative ways to treat or evaluate an animal. In the captive environment, husbandry training makes this possible.

“Respect your animals,” Johnson exhorted. “Honor them by your professionalism.” Johnson continued by saying that your actions during an immobilization may affect anesthesia. “Reduce the excitement levels (yours) and limit your physical activity.”

Mark showed the audience a video of wildlife biologists in the field anesthetizing black bears caught in snares left by the biologists. He emphasized the quiet demeanor of the biologists as they approached the black bears. During the sample collection and identification process, the biologists continued with their professional approach, speaking to each other only when necessary and maintaining calmness to their voices. Even their hands-on approach during the exam was smooth, yet deliberate. “Always add finesse,” whispered Johnson.

Mark shared his experiences in Katrina-torn Louisiana and Mississippi. He described how the use of a restraint device called a “y-pole” helped during the capture and rescue of hundreds of dogs that were left homeless after the hurricane. “The y-pole is an extremely useful tool when working with feral dogs,” explained Johnson. It is designed to be a humane tool that is used to quietly pin an animal that is captured or cornered just before it is anesthetized with a syringe pole. According to Johnson, it may also be used to initially control the canid before it is physically restrained. In many instances, the y-pole has replaced the use of the snare pole. “The risks and stresses are reduced when using a y-pole,” added Mark. “When used to pin a canid, it not only physically restrains the animal but psychologically restrains them as well. This can help quiet the animal, something the snare pole cannot do.”

“Always keep in mind that our second highest goal is placing our personal safety first,” Mark interjected.

Mark took time from his busy schedule to speak to our AAZK Chapter. He was at the California Wolf Center in Julian teaching his three-day course entitled Wildlife Handling and Chemical Immobilization for Wildlife Professionals. For more information on his course at the Wolf Center, visit www.californiawolfcenter.org.

“Wildlife Expose” Nicki Boyd, Children’s Zoo Animal Care Supervisor, and Brian Williams, Founder/Executive Director of the Red Panda Project

By Bob Cisneros, SD AAZK President

Each fall, the Wildlife Conservation Network hosts a Wildlife Conservation Expo in Los Altos, CA. Conservationists from all over the world who are currently working in the field are invited to speak about their progress in saving endangered species. Thanks to the Wheatley Foundation, SD AAZK Treasurer Nicki Boyd was able to attend last fall’s Expo and invited Brian Williams of the Red Panda Project to come to San Diego to update AAZK members on the current status of Red Panda Conservation. The Keynote speaker for the Wildlife Conservation Expo was Jane Goodall. She was greeted with a standing ovation from a maximum capacity crowd. Jane spoke of her newest endeavor, Roots and Shoots. “This is a program that empowers children to make a difference in conservation...rather than just tell them about the doom and gloom aspects, the children are given opportunities to do local conservation projects,” elaborated Nicki.

The Expo covered wildlife conservation projects from all over the world. “I am humbly trying try to explain what these people spent a lifetime doing,” Nicki continued. “I want to enlighten people about the expo and encourage them to come.”

Nicki highlighted six speakers from the conference:

- Siberian Tiger Conservation—Dr. Dale Miquelle
- Cheetah Conservation—Dr. Laurie Marker
- Elephant Conservation—Iain Douglas-Hamilton
- Andean Cat Conservation
- Painted Dogs—Greg Rasmussen
- Saving the Snow Leopard—Rodney Jackson

Brian Williams, Founder and Director of the Red Panda Project then spoke about red panda conservation in the Himalayas. “I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Prangbung, a remote village in the Panchthar region of the PIS corridor,” started Williams, “teaching fourth through sixth grade.” “It was during this experience that I was inspired to work in panda conservation.” Continuing about his Peace Corps experience in the Himalayas, “And when I was there, what inspired me to first think about conservation was the children I was teaching, the people of this region. But I also was inspired by the forest, by the beauty of this cloud forest of the Himalayas.”

According to Williams, there are three major threats to red panda conservation:

1. cutting down forest for cattle land and road building
2. firewood cutting
3. bamboo cutting

“These forests are being denuded because the people are just trying to sustain themselves. I want to know how the red panda fits in with them.” Williams then returned to the United States after working as a Peace Corps volunteer and attended graduate school. Williams made his way back to the Himalayas on a Fulbright scholarship to study red pandas in the wild. “I am only one of six people to have ever studied red panda in the wild. After completing his research in 2003, Williams learned that there was no organization dedicated to saving the red panda. “We want to raise awareness about red panda,” added Williams.

Williams and the Red Panda Project have teamed with the Mountain Institute and other organizations in Eastern Nepal and have helped reforest ten hectares of forest in Nepal. They have also, with the support of the Nepalese government, created a red panda protected forest. “This is the first of its kind in Nepal; a community based, community run forest”, added Williams. “This is a region that already has a thriving eco-tourism trade, roughly 40,000 a year come to this area to see red panda, rhododendron and to see snow. We are just going to build on that infrastructure that is already in place.”

If you are interested in more information on the Red Panda Project or red panda conservation, visit their website at:
<http://www.redpandaproject.org>

San Diego Chapter News

Board Members Wanted: Become part of the excitement and joy of being involved in local and international environmental issues! Some upcoming SD AAZK projects include: CA Wolf Center fundraiser, Conservation Fair, Bowling for Rhinos, membership drive, and various conservation programs.

SD AAZK's mission is 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. We also support deserving conservation projects to include educating the general public of the need for preserving our natural resources and animal life through these worthwhile efforts. SD AAZK establishes materials beneficial to zoo keeper education as well.

To become a SD AAZK board member, all you need is to be a member in good standing of the San Diego AAZK Chapter and national AAZK. Board positions are determined by fellow board members once you have been voted onto the board. It's fun and easy. Come join us! You'll be glad you did. Email, call, or let a board member know you are interested. Chapter contact information can be found on page 8 of our newsletter.

National AAZK Launches Monthly Newsletter "AAZK Insight" for AAZK Chapters: AAZK is now providing an open conduit of information between the Association and Chapters.

San Diego Chapters' members can view this newsletter on our web site at www.sdaazk.org. The newsletter includes national's objectives, chapter partnership, iGive.com (shopping with the ability to donate to AAZK), unfunded objectives and underwriting opportunities, sponsorship opportunities, and AAZK, Inc. merchandise. Be sure to check it out!

Join The Pack! Are you interested in providing some volunteer work for a worthwhile conservation organization? Are you looking for more animal-care experience?

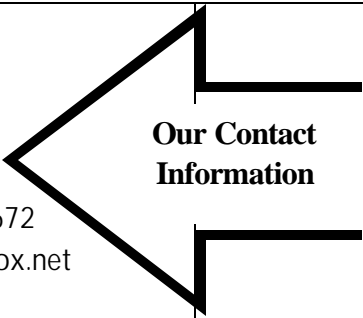
The California Wolf Center is looking for people who are interested in committing to volunteering one Saturday a month (more if you so desire). Volunteers are needed in the following areas: husbandry, construction and maintenance, office administration, development, membership, and public education.

Our mission at the California Wolf Center is to increase awareness and conservation efforts in protecting and understanding the importance of all wildlife and wild lands by focusing on the history, biology and ecology of the North American Gray Wolf through education, exhibition, reproduction of endangered species, and studies of captive wolf behavior.

For more information on becoming a volunteer, call the California Wolf Center at (619) 234-WOLF (9653) or e-mail them at info@californiawolfcenter.org. For more information on the California Wolf Center, visit their website at www.californiawolfcenter.org.

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The Keeper is published quarterly by the San Diego Chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers, Inc. (AAZK), a non-profit, tax-exempt organization with offices at P.O. Box 120551, San Diego, CA 92112; (619) 231-1515 ext. 4672. Address for editorial, advertising and membership inquiries: San Diego AAZK, P.O. Box 632984, Hillcrest Post Office San Diego, CA 92103. Reproduction or use without written permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Copyright © 1996 by the San Diego Chapter of AAZK. Subscriptions are included with the membership in the San Diego Chapter of AAZK or may be received for \$12 per year. Payable in U.S. currency only. The Keeper assumes no responsibility for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts or artwork not accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope may not be returned. The Keeper makes every effort to ensure that the products and services advertised in our pages are consistent with the environmental ethic we are trying to promote. Opinions expressed on these pages do not necessarily reflect the view of the San Diego Chapter of AAZK, AAZK, Inc., or the board of either chapter or parent organization.



The San Diego AAZK Chapter

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

CALENDAR

LOCAL EVENTS:

MARCH 14, 2006: Dr. Paul Ponganis. Emperor penguin: Elite Divers of the Antarctic. Zoo's Otto Center. 6:00 pm social, 6:30 pm presentation. All welcome.

APRIL 2, 2006: CA Wolf Center fundraiser. Wine Steals. University Ave, Hillcrest. 5:00-9:00 p.m. Silent auction. All welcome.

APRIL 23, 2006: Conservation Fair. Zoo ZPA (Zoo's Party Area). 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. All welcome.

MAY 2006: TBA

JUNE 3, 2006: BFR—Bowling for Rhinos. Kearny Mesa Bowl. Clairemont Mesa Blvd. 5:30 pm check in, 6:00-9:00 pm bowling, raffle, silent auction. Start

collecting your team sponsorship now! All welcome.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL EVENTS:

ABMA: March 5–10, 2006. San Diego, CA. Hosted by ZSSD and Sea World/CA. Wwww.theabma.org.

2nd International Congress of Zoo Keeping (ICZ): May 7–11, 2006 in Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. For info www.iczoo.org

2006 International Gorilla Workshop: June 23–26, 2006 at Paignton Zoo, Devon, England. More info to come.

33rd AAZK National Conference: September 15–20, 2006 in Chicago, IL. Hosted by the Lincoln Park Zoo AAZK Chapter. Info at www.aazk2006.org.

AZA Annual Conference: September 25–30, 2006. Hosted by Busch Gardens, Florida Aquarium, & Lowry Zoo Tampa, FL. More info at www.aza.org/ConfWork/AboutConf/#fut

Managing Animal Enrichment & Training: October 7–13, 2006 in Portland, OR. www.aza.org/prodev/

Past SD AAZK presentations on DVD: If you missed an AAZK presentation, you can find a copy at the ZSSD library. For more info, contact the ZSSD Library.

Go to the SD AAZK web site, www.sdaazk.org, to find out more about upcoming events !