

AAZK Grant Report.....

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This year I was able to attend the 2009 American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) joint conference with the International Congress of Zookeepers (ICZ) in Seattle, WA. This was only possible through the help of the AAZK Professional Development Grant and our local Kansas City Chapter of AAZK. For me, there were several highlights from this conference.

It was great to see old and new faces who share the same passions. There were people in attendance that I met at the first ICZ in the Netherlands! After being a keeper for ten years, it still amazes me how much I can still learn from someone next door or on the other side of the world. I was able to take information from presentations and apply it to the animals in my care and share it with other keepers at the Kansas City Zoo. Different enrichment ideas (bird and cephalopod enrichment especially), introduction methods (fission/fusion process), training of behaviors (red river hog training for exams and crate training a crocodilian), husbandry (ways to change up husbandry for weight loss in gorillas and building designs for a variety of animals) and *in-situ* conservation projects (Action for Cheetahs and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy).

This was my first time presenting at a conference which also made it special for me. My co-worker, Jacque Blessington, and I co-wrote two posters. The first poster was titled Establishing a Conditioning Program for a Red Flanked Duiker (*Cephalophus rufilatus*) to Determine and Monitor Pregnancy and the other one is titled Building a Red River Hog (*Potamochoerus porcus*) Restraint on Scraps. There was positive feedback from many keepers on our posters. This time, others were taking back information to their zoo on something I actually helped write! Next time, my goal is to stand in front of my peers and present a formal paper. After attending the "Job Fair - AAZK", I found a second goal, which is that I need to do more for the national organization. All the committees had great opportunities. I will be helping on the Membership Resources Committee with the products AAZK has available for sale.

There was one more highlight for me. I was impressed with the compassion that all those in attendance had. We all know keepers don't make a lot of money. It is the love of the job and not the pay that drives us. The donations raised to help typhoon ravaged Philippines and the Zookeepers Association of the Philippines was amazing. Keepers and attendees gave so much to those that most of us have never met.

Many thanks go to the grant committee and my local chapter for giving me the opportunity to attend the 2009 AAZK / ICZ conference.

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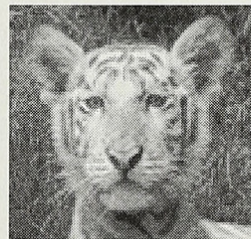
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