

## Behind the Scenes with the President

November 2007

Dear Friend of the Zoo,

As the director of a zoo, I'm frequently asked "Where do you get all those animals?" People seem to think that it's as easy as going to a store and purchasing whatever we need or want. They don't realize how complex the process can be.

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo is one of 211 zoos in the country accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. And becoming accredited is no easy task. In addition to adhering to a strict code of professional standards, facilities such as ours must undergo a rigorous process every five years that scrutinizes our finances and operations; animal health, nutrition and husbandry; employee expertise, retention and salaries; and just about everything else you can imagine. The goal is to make sure every accredited facility is stable so that we can provide good homes for our animals.

One of the benefits of being an accredited zoo is that within these 211 facilities we can transfer animals relatively freely. Animals are transferred between zoos for any number of reasons. Sometimes it's because of a breeding recommendation. Other times it might be because a zoo is constructing a new exhibit or phasing out a particular species from its collection. Occasionally it's because an animal's mate has died, in which case most zoos will go through extraordinary measures to make sure the surviving animal is paired with another companion, especially if it is a social species.

As most of you know, we are in the midst of constructing a Rocky Mountain Wild exhibit that will feature animals that are native to our region. However, native to the region does not necessarily mean easy to get. Obviously, we would never go out into the wilds of Wyoming or Montana to obtain the grizzly bears we want for this exhibit, nor were we able to convince any of the few accredited zoos with grizzlies in their collections to give us theirs. Luckily, Montana Game and Fish officials were aware of our desire for grizzlies and, as chance would have it, they had two orphaned youngsters that were in need of a home.

But sometimes things are so unexpectedly simple. Take for example a situation from this summer. The Zoo introduced two hugely popular Australian exhibits: wallabies and budgies. To augment these exhibits, we wanted to bring in 20 or so small alligators to represent the types of animals one might find in Australia. Enter Colorado Gators, an alligator "ranch" in Alamosa where the gators live outside year round thanks to a hot spring that runs through the property. In our

negotiations with Colorado Gators, they asked only three things from us: 1) that we give them \$100 gas money, 2) that we acknowledge them on our exhibit signage, and 3) that they be allowed to take a picture with our komodo dragon. You have to admire people who try to keep things simple.

Another uncomplicated animal acquisition that happened earlier this year occurred after getting a call from a guy that had been motorcycle riding and camping in the Arizona desert. When he got home and was unpacking his gear, a tarantula crawled out of his pack. Most of us would have been freaked out by this encounter and I'm sure it must have raised his eyebrow, but all he wanted was to find a good home for the tarantula. He brought it to us and the spider is now one of the small creatures that we'll be introducing to the public in our new Zoo on the Move (ZOOM) outreach program.

Finally, I'd like to share the story of Sadie, our Harris hawk. Sadie was bred for a purpose – falconry. Falconers train and use hawks to hunt rabbits and other small animals. One of my favorite books is *My Side of the Mountain*, which is about a young boy who trains a hawk to help him hunt; that is how he survives. Sadie was raised and trained for this purpose, but as she grew older her owner realized that she had a deformity in one of her legs. Her right leg had a bow in the joint and her owner was afraid that one day she would be diving down at full speed to get a rabbit and she would dislocate her leg, which would necessitate her being put to sleep. The falconer knew that we were starting Zoo on the Move and thought Sadie might be an asset to us since she is inquisitive and likes to be around people. Sadie has since become the star of the program and serves proudly as an ambassador for her species. Kids from all around the state have gotten a chance to get to know and love her.

Although we get the majority of our new arrivals in the form of babies or from other accredited zoos, sometimes it's the most unexpected partnerships and gifts that make for the most memorable stories. Thank you for allowing me to share a few of these stories with you.

Warmly,



Bob Chastain  
President & CEO  
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo