

Collaborative Health Research on Captive and Free-Ranging African Rhinoceros and Elephants

Veterinary staff from Disney's Animal Programs are partnering with wildlife professionals from Kruger National Park, South Africa and American zoo colleagues to enhance the health of rhinoceros and elephants.

The collaborative nature of this project is unique, since research projects in zoos and in the field have historically been completed independently. The goals of this project include identifying rhino and elephant health research priorities, improving the data collection process and enhancing the communication of research results among wildlife scientists, veterinarians, and managers of these species both in captivity and in the wild.

The project's first success was completing a list of research priorities that compare disease and health parameters in wild and captive animals. This will lead to the development of new and improved diagnostic tests that will ultimately help wildlife professionals make more scientifically-based management decisions.

Initial sample collections have also occurred with wild rhinoceros that were already scheduled to be immobilized for translocation in Kruger Park, South Africa. Participation in these field immobilizations has led to a better understanding of the logistics of sample collection and improved procedures. A bank of samples is now being created and diagnostic testing of the samples is underway.

The partnership between Disney's Animal Programs veterinarians and game capture veterinarians and staff is paving the way for shared sample collections that will be utilized by many different researchers. This information will improve knowledge of the health status of these threatened and endangered species, and eventually lead to better management of these special animals.



The field team collects blood from immobilized black rhinoceros in Kruger National Park, South Africa .



The Kruger Game Capture team approaches a white rhinoceros in preparation for blood collection. .