

How to Train Your Rhino



Training zoo animals is similar to training your pets at home, but these behaviors are definitely not tricks. We take the what, why, and how of training zoo animals very seriously. The Zoo is home to wild animals, and we want to stay true to their nature. However, in order to give them the best care possible, we need two key exceptions to that wild side – trust and access. Zookeeper Lisa, who works with Rupert the greater one-horned rhinoceros, described practicing these behaviors as similar to building up a love bank over time using their favorite treats and affection. Once that trust is established they don't mind the occasional poking and prodding. It also allows the keeper to establish a baseline for that animal. Lisa has spent so much time training with Rupert that she knows how to spot any irregularities in his skin, teeth, eyes, or behavior that she might otherwise not detect. She has trained Rupert to open his mouth to see his teeth and to lay down on his side in order to examine his

feet or draw blood. (How do we draw blood from a rhinoceros? Through his ears!) They have also worked on emergency recall, which is important when we need to get a rhinoceros inside quickly during a storm.

Zookeeper Rachel works regularly with our Malayan Sun Bear, Fong. She has trained Fong to open his mouth for tooth care, to offer his nails for trimming, and to lean in for injections. Rachel also works with Vivvy, our pregnant Binturong, who needs to stand still on her hind legs for long ultrasounds. Both Fong and Vivvy trust Rachel, know her voice, and come when she calls for them.

Some animals are quick to pick up the needed behavior in just days, others not so fast. The desired behavior needs to be caught, rewarded, and built upon. Adding to the difficulty are the exhibit barriers, as the keepers do not go into the exhibits with the animals. We also prioritize the animal's choice. If they don't want to train, they don't have to. Training has to be fun and exciting for that animal so they will choose to do it.



All treats are healthy and nutritious, but some have what Lisa calls high value to that specific animal. Fong loves peanut butter. Vivvy loves bananas. Rupert loves carrots. But they have to be careful to match the treat with the behavior. If you need a rhinoceros to lay still, he may get too excited when his high value treat is nearby.



Both Keepers will tell you that every animal in the Zoo has a different personality. They value different rewards, have different levels of retention and recall, and have different tolerance levels to interaction. It is up to the keepers to be sensitive and observant in order to learn these for each animal. In a way, the animals are also training the keepers.

Upcoming Events

Party for the Planet



April 22, 10am-1pm

Celebrate Earth times, come on!

It's time to come together and have a good time at Mesker Park Zoo as we throw our annual [Party for the Planet](#) event. Come interact with over 20 local businesses from the community to learn about what they do, how they are participating in earth conscious habits, and how you can too. With all sorts of Earth Day activities including a recycled art

contest display, animal encounters, zoo keeper chats, penguin palooza scavenger hunt, live music and entertainment, it is truly the place to be in Evansville to celebrate our planet! The event takes place on **Saturday April 22nd from 10am to 1pm**, but don't let that stop you from taking what you learn and putting it to use in your everyday life!



Bloomin' Zoo Plant Sale

May 5, 5:30-7:30 Preview Sale

May 6-7, 9am-4pm

We've created quite the following and enjoy seeing everyone each year at the Bloomin' Zoo Plant Sale! What started with a few tables over 20 years ago has turned into a plant geek following from all over the tristate. While the unusual is the usual at Bloomin' Zoo, we focus on native plants as well. And our fun tropical plants are always a hit!

Excited Bloomin' Zoo enthusiasts anxiously await the list to come out a few days in advance to plan out their shopping trip and see what's new!! Bloomin' Zoo Plant Sale starts Friday night, May 5th with a zoo members only pre-sale. Zoo members get to enjoy some early bird shopping fun with music. Not a member? Join us that night by purchasing a membership [here](#) or at the gate on your way in! Saturday and Sunday, zoo guests can enjoy some plant shopping during regular zoo hours while visiting the zoo! We will even watch your purchases as you enjoy the day seeing the sites at the zoo! Zoo horticulture staff and Botanical Docents will be on hand to answer all your plant questions! Be sure to follow [#mpzbg hort](#) for plant sale updates and sneak peeks!

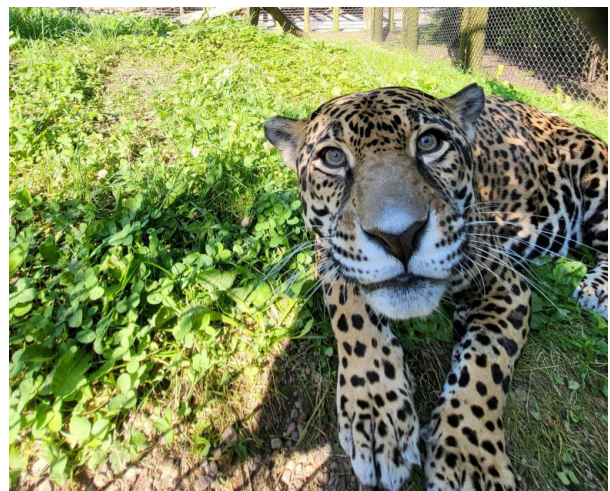
Thank you to our Party for the Planet Sponsors!

CenterPoint Energy
Dr. Terry and Kathy Talley

Beliza Blog

Three years ago, Mesker Park Zoo announced Beliza's cancer diagnosis and began treatment. With daily medications and outstanding care, we have continued to meet our promise of providing the best-in-class care to this amazing Jaguar.

Anyone who has met Beliza knows she is a sassy lady. In fact, Keeper Jackie questions if she works for the Zoo or for Beliza. "First rule when working with Beliza: **she is in charge**. Second rule: Beliza does not work for free." Work for Beliza is called shifting. Shifting means coaxing an animal to move through a door from one space to another within an exhibit. "Every now and then Beliza will surprise me and shift without food. Most of the time, Beliza will not shift unless she's given the proper amount of food. How much is the right amount? Only Beliza knows. I have no idea how she decides, but it could be 3 meatballs one day and 7 the next. It could be a fish or she may require meat to go with her fish. She will lay with her front legs crossed while watching the meatballs fall until she sees what she likes, then she'll shift. Beliza is in charge." You can imagine how Beliza



keeps Jackie on her toes to stay on schedule, get Beliza her medication, and clean the exhibit.

Each Morning Beliza gets a meat snack and medication for her elbow arthritis before being shifted onto exhibit. This is usually when Beliza notices Jackie walking outside the fence and begins to follow her. Jackie tells Beliza, "I have to go take care of the wolves and I'll be back!" Beliza will wait patiently until Jackie returns. Not long after, it's BUCKET TIME!! Beliza loves buckets. Keepers will run up and down the fence line as Beliza chases them (safely, with a barricade). This is good enrichment and exercise for her. By early afternoon, Beliza knows it is time for her main meal! She also gets a probiotic with her food. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, she gets Palladia. This is the medication she has been on for three years slowing the growth of her cancer. As the day comes to an end, it's time for Beliza's last arthritis pill.

This specialized treatment and care has kept this sassy kitty around for 3 quality years, and we hope to keep her around for many more. But this daily medication is quite expensive. One month of treatment is \$1,200, and we need your support to keep her treatment going. Follow along with Beliza and her keeper to learn how your financial support is benefitting her. Please [donate](#) to make a difference in this lady's life.

[FACEBOOK](#)

[INSTAGRAM](#)

meskerparkzoo.com

