



Smithsonian Institution Archives

History of the Conservation and Research
Center, National Zoological Park, Oral
History Interviews, 1992-1999, 2005

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Washington, D.C.
Contact us at osiaref@si.edu

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu |
| Title: | History of the Conservation and Research Center, National Zoological Park, Oral History Interviews |
| Identifier: | Record Unit 9596 |
| Date: | 1992-1999, 2005 |
| Extent: | 13 audiotapes (reference copies). |
| Language: | Language of Materials: English |

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9596, History of the Conservation and Research Center, National Zoological Park, Oral History Interviews

Access Restriction

(1) Restricted; (2) see finding aid for details on restrictions; (3) use of this record unit requires prior arrangement with the Archives staff.

Historical Note

The National Zoological Park's Conservation and Research Center, now called the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, was established in 1975 on 3,100 acres at a former US Army Cavalry Remount Station in Front Royal, Virginia, to encourage development of all aspects of animal sciences. Renamed the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in 2010, the institute's mission is the conservation of biodiversity through scientific research, professional training, and environmental education. Dr. Theodore H. Reed, then director of the National Zoo, had been searching over a decade for a captive breeding facility where animals could be studied and bred without the stress of public viewing, when he heard of the possibility of obtaining the old Remount Station property. Other locations were examined, including La Plata, Maryland; Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp; and a nine hundred acre portion of Camp A. P. Hill in Virginia; but none could compare with the potential and existing on-site facilities offered by the old remount depot. The property was occupied by the Smithsonian in 1974, and title to the land was received in 1975. The facility was named the Conservation and Research Center, and was staffed with a dozen employees from various National Zoo departments, as well as a handful of former Cavalry Remount Station and Beef Cattle Research Station employees. In 2010, the center was renamed the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. Institute research has always covered a broad array of subjects including ethology, conservation biology, ecology and biodiversity monitoring, reproductive biology and animal health, genetic diversity and systematics, and nutrition and geographic information systems. CRC researchers are involved in groundbreaking research pertaining to the conservation of endangered species and ecosystems locally, nationally, and around the world. The institute breeds and houses a wide range of endangered species. Institute staff have focused on such endangered species

as the last living family of black-footed ferrets, the Guam rail, cranes, clouded leopards, Przewalski's wild horses, and Matschie's tree kangaroos. The institute also trains wildlife biologists from developing countries and conducts international research projects, such as the elephants of Southeast Asia led by Christian Wemmer. The goal of their research programs is to develop long-term, collaborative conservation initiatives that utilize a diverse array of scientific, cultural, and political tools to understand and protect species and their ecosystems.

John F. Eisenberg (1935-2003) received his bachelor's degree from Washington State University and his master's and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1961. He joined the staff of the National Zoological Park as a mammalogist in 1965. In 1982 he joined the faculty of the University of Florida until his retirement in 2000. He was best known for his 1981 volume, *The Mammalian Radiations: An Analysis of Trends in Evolution, Adaptation, and Behavior*.

Eugene Maliniak (1926-1996), a World War II veteran, was hired as a keeper at the National Zoological Park in 1951. In his early years at the Zoo, he worked with birds, reptiles, carnivores, and bears before moving to the Small Mammal House from 1957 to 1965. In 1965, he transferred to the Department of Scientific Research where he assisted Zoo curators with research on animal behavior and nutrition, until his retirement in 1985.

Theodore H. Reed (1922-2013), veterinarian and zoo administrator, received the D.V.M. in 1945 from the School of Veterinary Medicine, Kansas State College. From 1946 to 1955, he practiced as a veterinarian in Oregon and Idaho. He gained experience with exotic animals while serving as a veterinarian to the Portland Zoological Park from 1951 to 1955. In 1955, Reed was appointed Veterinarian at the National Zoological Park (NZN). In 1956, he was named Acting Director after the retirement of William M. Mann, and in 1958, he advanced to Director. During his tenure, Reed oversaw a capital renovation of the NZN; development of the Conservation and Research Center (CRC) in Front Royal, Virginia, in 1974; a transition from display of exotic specimens to breeding of endangered species; and many advances in exotic animal care and medicine. Reed retired from administration in 1983 and from the NZN in 1984.

Kenneth E. Stager (1915-2009) received a bachelor's degree in 1940 from the University of California at Los Angeles, a master's degree in zoology in 1953 and a doctorate in 1962 from the University of Southern California. He began working at the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History as a student in the 1930s. He was appointed assistant curator in 1941 and curator of ornithology and mammalogy in 1946, remaining at the L.A. County Museum until his retirement in 1976. He was interviewed because of his field research in Southeast Asia and work with NZN staff.

Christen M. Wemmer (1943-) directed the Conservation and Research Center (CRC), National Zoological Park (NZN) from 1974 to 2004. Wemmer received a B.S. and M.S. from San Francisco State College and the Ph.D. from University of Maryland in 1972, and began his career at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago. He was the founding director of the Conservation and Research Center of the National Zoological Park since its creation in 1974.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives' record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also interviews conducted by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Wemmer, director of the Conservation and Research Center (CRC), National Zoological Park (NZN), conducted a series of oral history interviews with individuals central to the history of the CRC from 1992 to 1999. He transferred the interviews to the Oral History Collection, Institutional History Division, Smithsonian Institution Archives in 2001 in order to document the early history of this endangered species facility now known as the Conservation Biology Institute (CBI) of the NZP. Wemmer interviewed John F. Eisenberg (1935-2003), former NZP mammalogist, on 13 March 1992. Wemmer and Larry R. Collins, CRC mammalogist, interviewed Eugene Maliniak (1926-1996), former NZP mammalogist, on 9 April 1992. Wemmer interviewed Theodore H. Reed (1922-2013), director of the NZP when CRC was founded, on 18 October 1993. Wemmer interviewed Kenneth E. Stager (1915-2009), ornithologist, on 7 December 1999. Wemmer's remarks and reminiscences at his retirement ceremony on 23 July 2004 were recorded for the collection, and historian of science Catherine A. Christen also conducted interviews with Wemmer in 2005.

Descriptive Entry

Eisenberg was interviewed in 1992 by Wemmer and discussed his education and career. Maliniak was interviewed by Collins and Wemmer in 1992 and discussed his career before and during his years at the NZP, especially the many animal species he worked with. Reed was interviewed by Wemmer in 1993 and discussed his career at the NZP and reminisced about animals and colleagues. Stager was interviewed by Wemmer in 1999 and discussed his field work in Southeast Asia, especially Burma. Wemmer's remarks at his retirement in 2004 were recorded; Christen conducted two interviews of him in 2005, covering his education, field work, research and career as an administrator. The collection consists of 16.5 hours of audiotape recording; and occupies 0.5 linear meters of shelf space. The interviews are not transcribed. There are three generations of recordings for each session: original tapes, preservation recordings and reference recordings. In total, this collection is comprised of 13 original audiocassette tapes; 13 reference copy audiotape cassettes, 37 7" and 7" low torque reel to reel preservation audiotapes and 24 digital preservation .wav files. Box 1 contains cassette copies of the original cassettes and DVDs with 24 .mp3 files. The original cassettes, preservation reel to reel recordings and digital files are in security storage.

The Eisenberg, Maliniak, and Stager interviews cannot be used without the permission of the interviewees or their heirs or assigns.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Biological stations
- Biology -- Field work
- Conservation biology
- Employees
- Endangered species
- Zoos.

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history

Names:

Christen, Catherine A., interviewer
Collins, Larry R., interviewee
Conservation and Research Center (National Zoological Park)
Eisenberg, John Frederick, 1935-
Eisenberg, John Frederick, 1935-, interviewee
Maliniak, E. (Eugene)
Maliniak, E. (Eugene), interviewee
National Zoological Park (U.S.)
Reed, Theodore H.
Reed, Theodore H., interviewee
Stager, Kenneth E., 1915-
Stager, Kenneth E., 1915-, interviewee
Wemmer, Christen M.
Wemmer, Christen M., interviewer

Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Box 1 of 1 There are no transcripts of these interviews.

Audio Recordings of Interviews

Box 1 of 1 Interview 1: 13 March 1992

Box 1 of 1 Interview 2: 9 April 1992

Box 1 of 1 Interview 3: 18 October 1993

Box 1 of 1 Interview 4: 7 December 1999

Box 1 of 1 Interview 5: 23 July 2004

Box 1 of 1 Interview 6: 4 February 2005

Box 1 of 1 Interview 7: 5 February 2005