INTRODUCTION

The okapi, Okapi johnstoni, is one of the last large mammals to be discovered (1901) and was initially thought to be related to horses. Later they were assigned to the family Giraffidae and are the only other genus beside Giraffa (true giraffes) in that family.

Similarities between giraffes and okapis include their gait and gestation as well as structural similarities. Adult okapis weight 440 - 650 lb. (200 - 300 kg.) (Nowak, 1991).

Okapis are mature when three years old; in captivity, their average lifespan is 25 years.

Because okapis are reclusive and sedentary, enclosures should be planted as heavily as possible in order to provide cover.

HUSBANDRY

Temperature: Okapis tolerate a wide variety of temperature extremes and may be kept outside when temperatures are between 40 - 117 degrees F. (5 - 48 C.). Care should be taken, however, not to expose them to wind, rain and strong sun. Severe temperature fluctuations may develop upper respiratory and other medical problems. At night, okapis should be housed in ventilated indoor quarters. Indoor temperatures should be maintained between 60 - 85 degrees F. (15 - 27 C.).

Enclosures:
Outdoor enclosures should contain at least 1,500 sq. ft. (140 sq. m.) of space per animal. Indoor quarters should measure at least 15 ft. x 20 ft. or 300 sq. ft.
(4.6 m. x 6.1 m. or 28 sq. m.); ceilings should be at least 8 ft. (2.4 m.) high. Only one animal should be housed per stall. Flooring surfaces of cement covered with resilient product are best. When held for long periods of time on concrete, okapis may experience leg or foot problems. Owners planning on reproduction should include a nest or crib area for young.

Because of their high urine output, bedding is recommended. Hay or wood shavings work well for this purpose.

Physical and visual barriers may be constructed of cable, chainlink, wood or block. Walls should be at least 6 ft. (1.8 m.) high. Although chain link and cable are structurally satisfactory, either may cause injury to the animals if they become excited. When chain link or cable are used, visual barriers should be located behind them to give the appearance of a solid barrier.

**Diet:**
Okapi are browsers and should be offered natural browse as often as possible. Browse should be hung in areas that are accessible at all times. Commercial feeds suitable for browsing species (ADF 16), and complete with adequate levels of selenium, are recommended. Alfalfa should also be fed free choice to allow animals to forage as needed. All feeders, both hay and commercial, should be mounted at least 3 ft. (1 m.) off the ground unless very young animals are present. A mineralized salt block should be available *ad lib.*

**Water:**
A fresh supply of clean water should be provided in all enclosures. Care should be taken to locate water sources away from feeding areas so that the food is not contaminated with feed, feces or other materials. Automatic watering devices work well with this species.
Social:
Okapis are very reclusive animals and may be kept by themselves, in pairs consisting of one adult male and female, or as a female and young. Bulls should not be kept in sight of each other when cows are present.

Veterinary needs:
Like giraffes, services of a veterinarian experienced with large ungulates should be available prior to animal acquisition. Semiannual fecal examinations should be made and treated appropriately. All individuals should be vaccinated against tetanus and other clostridial diseases; where geographically appropriate, they should also be vaccinated against rabies. If animals are likely to be transferred to other facilities, methods of individually identifying animals via transponders, ear tag, photograph or tattoo should be considered.

LITERATURE CITED