NAME OF SYSTEM:

Animal Inventory Management

ORIGINATOR:

National Zoological Park
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20009

OBJECTIVE. To establish a simple, economical, and effective document reference system that will give immediate access to the current inventory of and information on the National Zoological Park animal population. To also assure a system capability for limited manipulation of data about animals to meet unpredictable research or other needs.

BACKGROUND. The National Zoo currently maintains and manages a group of about 3,200 animals. In supervising this unusual activity, veterinarians, administrative personnel, and the many animal keepers need access to a large array of information on individual animals and various animal groups. Each of these user groups need both specific as well as general data on unpredictable animal happenings or events. The former conventional method of maintaining information on the zoo population made it difficult to readily correlate, compare, or analyze data in the desired manner.

THE NEW METHOD. The Animal Inventory Management System uses an 8 x 10 inch, edge-notched card form containing 166 coding positions as the basic index reference media. The cards are made in sets consisting of the basic card and two 5 x 8 inch carbon interleaf card forms containing 80 coding holes that serve as duplicate reference files. The larger edge-notched card is maintained in the Chief Veterinarian's Office, while the two smaller cards serve the index reference needs of the Administrative Office and the Animal Keeper's Office.

Under the edge-notched card system a separate card is maintained for each animal in the Zoo. For ease of identity, cards at each of the three file locations are color-coded—blue for birds, white for mammals, and beige for reptiles. The color code permits the file to be readily divided into the three categories, thus aiding both the card filing task as well as the reference search request. While this card filing arrangement is basically equivalent to a convertional card filing system, the coding characteristics of the edge-notched card system give the file its nonconventional classification.

General information is typed on these cards in the conventional manner. However, the various animal attributes are entered into the master card by means of a hand punch. This punch "notches out" the specific holes that comprise the codes representing the attributes of each animal. The codes cover such animal information as identity, receiving date, method of acquisition, vaccination status, health status, and departure date.

When looking up information concerning a particular animal, the file is searched in the conventional manner. However, when conducting searches on the basis of any of the coded animal attributes, the full value of the edge-notched card system is apparent. As an example, a veterinarian may wish to know the identity of all tigers having a certain immunization profile. Initially, the searcher would isolate all the white index cards representing the mammal category. He would next use the "needle search" technique to select the edge-notched cards for all tigers from the mammal portion of the file. Finally, a second needle search would "drop out" all tiger cards meeting the immunization code criteria. With the identity of this select group of animals now known, the veterinarian would take his planned action.

REMARKS. This edge-notched card reference method is an inexpensive, simple system having minimum equipment requirements, and it can be operated by personnel without special skills or training. The system offers a limited ability to manipulate data for unpredictable purposes and may be updated to

reflect animal inventory changes. It also has features that allow for easy duplication of the master file with a minimum of additional cost or effort. A limiting condition inherent in this system is the loss of search efficiency when the file size approaches 3,000–5,000 cards. At that point the needle search process becomes increasingly slow and tedious.

ANIMAL INVENTORY MANAGEMENT