


[Print Page](#)

## Hanna speaks at local benefit

By KATHERINE HEAD  
Bigfork Eagle

"Jungle" Jack Hanna says he comes to Montana to rest, but his summer calendar has been full of various local speaking engagements. Last week Hanna spoke at a benefit for the Northwest Connections educational programs in the Swan Valley.

"I believe in what they are doing here," Hanna said. "People give to people, they don't give to causes. After all, good causes need great people behind them, and these people give so much here."

"The people" refers to Tom and Melanie Parker, the couple behind Northwest Connections. Started in 1997, Northwest Connections offers ecological immersion programs for high school and college students. Melanie Parker said Hanna was a great choice to speak at the function.

"People associate Jack with wildlife, and animals is what people identify with," she noted. "It is a natural progression from Jack to wildlife to landscape."

And the more than 250 people who paid to see Hanna agreed. Those in attendance crammed into the small Swan Valley Community Hall in Condon to listen to Hanna describe some of his adventures and stress that Montana's ecological wonders are equally as impressive.

"This is a very special place, not just because of the people but because of your beautiful natural resources," Hanna said.

Hanna showed video clips from his television program, "Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures." The clips showcased animals from every continent on the globe. He noted that he will soon be returning to Rwanda for his third trip to see the mountain gorillas. Before showing a clip on a bear study in New Mexico, Hanna asserted that he is "not anti-hunter. It's a good thing we do have hunters, because we have lost a great deal of our natural predators."

Finally Hanna showed a video of Anna Mertz, a little old lady with a passion for black rhinos. The dainty woman enclosed 60,000 acres with electrified fence to keep poachers out and the rhinos in. When she started the project, she had four rhinos.

Over the years, that number increased to 30--important because the black rhino is nearly extinct due to the high price its horn fetches on the black market.

In particular, Mertz bonded with a baby rhino abandoned by its mother. She bottle-fed the animal and dubbed it Samia.

"She's a rhino, but she's still my friend," Mertz said.

Just after filming the follow-up, Hanna noted that Samia was killed by poachers who broke into the enclosure.

Hanna said that mankind has not been kind to the planet and its animals.

"My generation--the Baby Boomers--did more to damage the planet than any other," he relayed.

Education, is the number one priority, according to Hanna. Generations to follow can learn from past mistakes and misjudgments.

Also, he noted that it is important for youth to have ambition. At 12 years old, Jack Hanna cleaned cages in a veterinary office. Now he is one of the most recognized faces in zoology.

"All of you young people, live your dream," he said.



Matthew Tarvin/for the Bigfork Eagle  
Jack Hanna mingles with the crowd and signs autographs before delivering a presentation at the Swan Valley Community Hall last week. The event was a benefit for Northwest Connections.