
Black Rhinoceros Fact Sheet (5/1/94)

Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*)

Description: The black rhinoceros is actually grey instead of black. It is the third largest land animal, after the elephant and the white rhinoceros, standing over five feet tall and weighing one and a half tons. It has two horns and a hooked, prehensile upper lip which distinguishes it from the white rhino. While it has a good sense of smell, it is very near-sighted. Its horn is made up dense fibers similar to the material in fingernails and may grow up to 4 or 5 feet in length.

Range: Black rhinos are now limited to areas of eastern and southern Africa.

Habitat: Brush and scattered open woodlands are the preferred habitat of the black rhino. It can also be frequently found in mud wallows.

Diet: The black rhino is a browsing animal which feeds on leaves, twigs, and shrubs.

Social Organization: Black rhinos are often aggressive animals known for their fierce temperament. Many times its charge is only a bluff, however. An adult black rhino has no natural enemies. Black rhinos live either singly or in small groups of females led by a male. Females have one or occasionally two young, which may take up to three years to leave its mother.

Conservation Status: There are an estimated 2,400 black rhinos in the wild, down from 65,000 just 20 years ago. It is listed as an endangered species in the IUCN Red Data Book, an Appendix I species under CITES, and as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Threats to Survival: Poaching is the primary threat to the black rhino. It is hunted for its horn, which is used as a medicinal powder in Asia, and for making daggers in Yemen. The black rhino population has been reduced by 96% since 1970, yet there has been no proof of any medicinal or aphrodisiac powers found in rhino horn. Rhinos are also threatened to a lesser degree by habitat destruction.

Zoo Programs -- SSP: 97 black rhinos in North America are managed under the SSP. An integrated approach of managing both captive and wild populations is needed to save the black rhino. Ten wild Southern black

rhinos were recently brought to the U.S. from Zimbabwe under the AZA Black Rhino SSP to increase the gene pool in the SSP. The hope is to preserve the Southern sub-species in captivity and eventually return them to Zimbabwe when better protection is available.

Conservation: While black rhinos are protected by strict laws prohibiting hunting, poaching continues to be a problem. Even in national parks and reserves enforcement of rhino hunting laws is difficult in the face of ever higher prices for rhino horn and the availability of automatic weapons in the region. High voltage fencing around some preserves has slowed poaching. Funds from Michael Werikhe's Rhino Walk U.S.A., sponsored in part by AZA, has gone towards conservation measures, including capture and transport of over 100 black rhinos to safer areas where they can be studied.

Education: The International Rhino Foundation (IRF) is working to assist with in-situ and captive breeding programs worldwide. A global captive action plan for all rhinos is currently being developed.

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