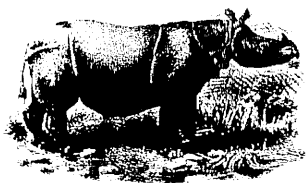


# THE RHINOCEROS: *A Legacy in Danger*

**I** magine for a moment that you are the proud owner of a time machine. You set the dial for the early Tertiary period some forty million years ago. Your destination is what is now present-day Nebraska. You are viewing a herd of what appears to be small horses about the size of a fox. In reality, what you are seeing is an early form of a now-extinct rhinoceros.



BY MICHAEL DEE, CURATOR OF MAMMALS

TAD HOTOVA







◀ (PREVIOUS PAGE) Never far from one another, Shabani (left) and her mother Mabel can be seen on exhibit with Gus in the Africa section of the Zoo.

◀ (PREVIOUS PAGE) Rarely spotted in the wild, less than one hundred Javan rhinos are known to exist.

▲ The Zoo's Sumatran rhino, Em, has fun in the mud on a rainy day.

**Y**ou move on to what is now present-day Soviet Central Asia. As you emerge from your machine several million years later, you come face to knee with the Indricotherium. Standing 17-18 feet tall, this huge rhino, weighing 13 tons, was the heaviest land mammal to ever walk the face of the earth.

Between 40 million and 15,000 years ago, more than thirty species of rhino were distributed over most of the world. With the exception of Australia, South America and Antarctica, rhinoceros fossils have been found on every continent. Today only five species remain. At the present time, there are two species found in Africa — the white and the black; both carry two horns. Three species inhabit Asia — the Indian, Javan and Sumatran; except for the Sumatran, which carries two horns like its African relatives, they have only a single horn. All five are endangered by poachers who kill them for their body parts, including their horns, blood, skin and urine.

Female rhinos become sexually mature between the ages of three and five years and males between five and eight. The heat period varies among the five species, but generally appears to occur about every 28-45 days. The average gestation is roughly 460-480 days, although that of the Indian rhino has been known to last as long as 515 days.

The Los Angeles Zoo has bred successfully both the Indian and the black rhino. A pair of white rhinos never bred while they were exhibited at the Zoo between 1966 and 1982. However, two years later, after they were moved to the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose, Texas, they produced a calf. At the present time, the Zoo exhibits three species of rhinoceros: black, Indian, and Sumatran. The Sumatran rhino has yet to breed in North America as there is only one male available at the present time. (Please see "Saving a Species: The Sumatran Rhino Trust" on pages 24 - 27.)

▶  
Females, such as this black rhino, are protective of their young, and will defend them from anything they perceive as a threat.

▼  
The Zoo's black rhino Mabel stands beside her offspring Shabani, approximately three months old when this photograph was taken.

ANIMALS ANIMALES TERRY C. MURPHY



The white or square-lipped rhinoceros is purported to be the second largest land mammal after the elephants. An adult male can weigh up to 8,000 pounds. Around the turn of the century, the population was estimated at under 50, but now, thanks to proper protection, their numbers have climbed to 4,800.

There are two subspecies of white rhino: the northern and the southern. The northern is critically endangered, following a precipitous decline in the early 1980s when as few as 1,000 animals were found in Uganda, Zaire and southern Sudan. Today the remaining group lives in Garamba National Park in Zaire. The main causes of its decline include poaching, civil strife and habitat destruction.

The fate of the southern subspecies is far more encouraging. A number of these rhinos were moved to protected reserves, private farms and ranches in South Africa. In the early 1970s, two groups of twenty animals each were sent to the Zoological Society of London's Whipsnade Wild Animal Park and the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Until these two groups were established, it was uncommon for the white rhino to breed in captivity. In less than twenty years, however, there have been in excess of 75 calves born at the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

At one time, the black or hook-lipped rhino enjoyed a very large distribution throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Up until 1972, the entire population was estimated at between 65,000 and 100,000 animals. Between 1972 and 1985, roughly 95% of the black rhinos were poached. Today the population is less than 4,000.

The rapid decline of the black rhinoceros has been due mainly to the demand for its horn. The big increase in oil prices in 1972 boosted the pressure for rhino horn as more money became available to purchase expensive items. Rhinos were killed so that their horns could be used to make dagger handles. These daggers, called djambias, are coveted as status symbols by many men in Middle Eastern countries.

Despite being fully protected in every country in which the black rhino is found, the demand and the extremely high price paid for its horn have made the species a highly profitable target. Efforts have been under way for the last ten years to capture and move black rhinos to protected reserves and zoos. The Los Angeles Zoo received a pair from Zimbabwe in 1982 and the female gave birth to a calf in early 1983. Currently the Zoo exhibits two male and four female black rhinos.

Of the three Asian species, the Indian rhinoceros is perhaps the most unusual looking. When seen in profile, this large mammal resembles a living tank, with its skin in folds and what appear to be rivets on its rump and forequarters. In contrast to its large size and awkward appearance, the Indian is able to run in excess of 25 miles an hour over short distances, as can all five rhino species.



Five Indian calves have been born at the Los Angeles Zoo since 1982. The current world population of this species is under 2,000; in the wild they are found only in Nepal and northeastern India. Within Royal Chitwan National Park, the population has expanded, thanks to the excellent



protection provided by the Royal Nepalese Army. As a result, a number of rhinos have been translocated to Royal Bardia National Park, an area this species inhabited formerly. Here they have produced young, living testimony to the success of this important conservation effort.

**T**he Javan rhinoceros is one of the rarest large mammals in the world; less than 100 are known to exist in two localities. The largest known population (50-60) is located in Ujung Kulon National Park on the island of Java. A second smaller population was discovered recently in South Vietnam. Like the Indian rhino, the Javan is plated with folds, but instead of rivets, the skin is more akin to a mosaic-like pattern. There are no Javan rhinos in captivity and it wasn't until 1966 that a color photo of this species was taken.

The Sumatran rhinoceros, or Asian hairy rhino, is the smallest of the rhinos and also the one with the most visible hair. In 1982 the Los Angeles Zoo became involved in the initial planning of the Sumatran Rhino Trust. The first animal to arrive here made her debut in November of 1988. In the spring of 1989 she left for her permanent home in Cincinnati. She was followed in the fall by another female who stayed in Los Angeles until the spring of 1990 when she left for the Bronx Zoo in New York.

In November of 1991, the Los Angeles Zoo received its third Sumatran rhino. Unlike the first two, this young female named Embam will remain in Los Angeles. She is a favorite among staff and visitors alike. This lively youngster, estimated to be one-and-a-half years old, can be seen between the elephant and hippo exhibits. Our goal is to obtain a mate for Embam in order that she may contribute to the future survival of her species.

Time is running out for the rhinoceros. The future of the five remaining species — whose history on this planet began some forty million years ago — is in our hands. So let's do everything we can to make sure they survive. □

▲  
The white rhino is the largest of the five remaining species.

◀  
Radha was one of the Zoo's most prolific Indian rhinos. Here, she is pictured with one of her calves, a male named Chandra who now resides at the Oklahoma City Zoo.

