

Indian Rhinos Arrive at White Oak

In June of 2003, White Oak received a pair of Indian rhinos from the National Zoo in Washington, DC. The rhinos, a male named Mohan and a female named Mechi, were relocated to White Oak where it is hoped they may be encouraged to reproduce, particularly in the case of the male who is approximately 35 years old and has never produced any offspring.

The Indian rhino, also known as the Indian/Nepalese rhino or the Greater (Asian) one-horned rhino, is, along with the white rhino, considered to be the largest of the five living species of rhinoceros. The Indian rhino is particularly distinctive as it appears to be covered with plates of armor, which are really folds of skin. The Indian rhino is endangered, with about 2,400 surviving (about 1,800 in India and 600 in Nepal). The Indian population was perhaps as low as 20-40 rhinos around 1900. The Nepalese population also edged near extinction in the mid-1960s when their population declined to fewer than 100. Largely as the result of intensive protection measures, both the Indian and Nepalese populations have recovered from those earlier, disastrously low numbers, and continue to be on the increase. Very recent trends suggest a need for a continued vigilance on behalf of the species, particularly in Nepal.

Nepal's army has traditionally had a major role in protecting the rhinos. With recent political and military conflicts in Nepal during the last two years, poaching has been on the increase. As with all five species of rhinos, the most secure conservation strategy seems to be a diversified one that incorporates both protection for the animals within their range states, supplemented by breeding in zoos and conservation centers.

In North America, the Species Survival Plan (SSP) for the Indian Rhino has prospered with a population growth rate of



Since their arrival at White Oak, the Indian rhino pair have proven to be compatible, and, allowed the room to roam solo or in tandem, have shared space, food, even taken mud baths together; but no nuptials as of this time. The female, Mechi, who has produced a calf by another male, is cycling regularly



Mohan & Mechi get acquainted in their spacious new home at White Oak.

about 4%, as good as some of the wild populations. Currently, there are 56 Indian rhinos in the SSP which has a target population of 100 individuals to ensure long-term viability. As encouraging as is the SSP's population growth rate, that population derives from a limited number of founders (animals born in the wild) and, exacerbating that concern, some of the founders have yet to reproduce and are getting well along in years. Mohan, at approximately 35 years of age, falls squarely into this category.

and has made some overtures toward Mechi. He, on the other hand, seems indifferent to such proposals. Mohan may have another two to three years of (potential) reproductive life and a lot can happen in that stretch of time. Encouraged by the rhinos' mutually amicable nature and the fact that White Oak's spacious rhino facilities have resulted in previous successes in reproduction involving two other older, confirmed bachelors (in both cases, white rhinos), we are optimistic that Mohan may still pass his valuable genes along to the next generation in the form of an offspring or two. A little tincture of time and patience seems to be in order, along with a little more initiative on Mohan's part.

