

India:

Indian rhinos: the lowdown

Name and species

- Scientific name: *Rhinoceros unicornis*, "rhino" meaning nose and "Cero" meaning horn in Greek, and "uni" meaning one and "cornis" meaning horn in Latin
- The Indian rhino is also known as the Greater One-horned rhino

Physical characteristics

- The Indian Rhino has a brownish-gray hairless skin, which develops thick folds, resembling armour-plating. They are very vulnerable to sunburn and spend much time wallowing in mud, which protects their skin
- Indian rhinos have one horn, which is typically 8-24 inches (20-61cm) long
- They have a prehensile upper lip
- They are herbivores, feeding on grass, fruits, leaves, tree and shrub branches and cultivated crops
- Indian rhinos live an average of 30-45 years in the wild; while the longevity record for those in captivity is 47 years
- Indian rhinos are second in size only to the white rhino. They weigh between 4-6,000 pounds (1,800-2,700 kilos), stand 5.75-6.5 feet (1.75-2 metres) tall at the shoulder, and are 10-12.5 feet (3-3.8 metres) long

Location and habitat

- The three main strongholds of the Indian rhino are Kaziranga National Park in Assam, in the northeast of India, and Royal Chitwan National Park and Royal Bardia National Park in Nepal
- They inhabit floodplains and riverine grasslands

Social behaviour and breeding

- Indian rhinos are usually solitary, except for females with calves. Males have loosely defined territories, which are not well defended and often overlap. It is not unusual to see a meadow with several animals all grazing close together
- Females are sexually mature at 5-7 years of age; males at 10 years. Their gestation period is approximately 15-16 months, and they give birth every 2-3 years

Under threat

- The Indian rhino is one of the two greatest success stories in rhino conservation (the other being the southern white rhino in South Africa). With strict protection from Indian and Nepalese wildlife authorities, Indian rhino numbers have recovered from under 200 in this century to around 2,400 today. However, poaching has remained high and the success is precarious without continued and increased support for conservation efforts in India and Nepal



BROOKE SQUIRES



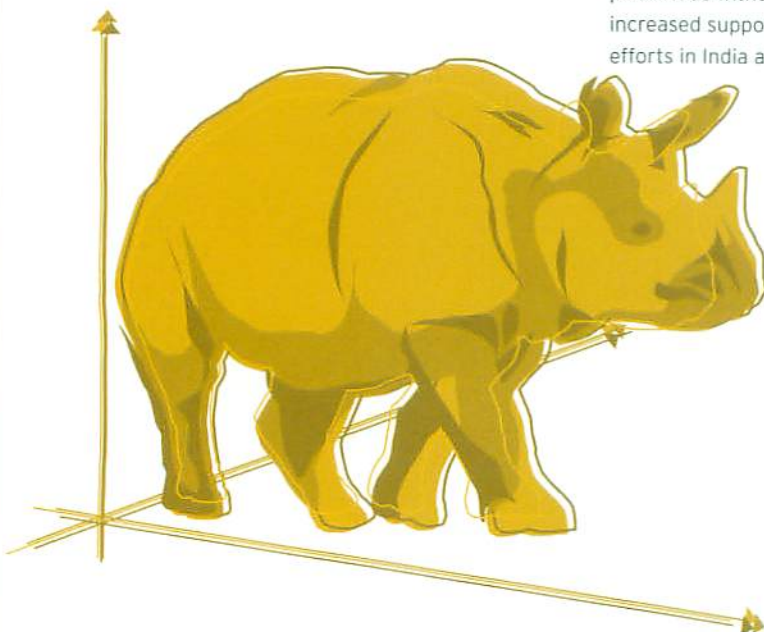
CATHY DEAN



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100th birthday celebrations for Kaziranga's rhinos

Another busman's holiday, this time to Kaziranga National Park, in Assam, in India's North Eastern States, home of the Greater One-horned rhino, aka the Indian rhino.

I need not have worried about getting a good sighting. Over four days we saw over 100 of the rotund, primitive-looking creatures. Kaziranga, which is only 429 km sq, is home to at least 1,550 Indian rhinos, as recorded in the 1999 census. The next (they are carried out every six years in Kaziranga) was due to take place in March 2005, and Mr N K Vasu, the Park's Director, confidently predicts a dramatic increase.

Poaching was a real problem in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, with up to 48 animals being killed in a single year. In recent years, this has been much reduced, with only three animals poached (all outside the Park's boundaries) in 2004. This comes at a high price: Mr Vasu employs 550 armed rangers to protect

Kaziranga's rhinos. That works out at more than one man per km sq; contrast this with Tsavo East National Park, where Kech's 25 or so men have to patrol an area 12,000 km sq, or one man per 480 km sq! Kaziranga's operating costs must be pretty hefty.

Kaziranga is a beautiful place, with lush elephant grass and plentiful water; perfect habitat for rhinos. There's also a chance of seeing one of the Park's 80+ tigers, as well as sambar, hog and barking deer, wild boar and even gaur, as well as an incredible array of birdlife. Yet only around 2,000 western tourists visit Kaziranga each year. Perhaps the cost of flying from Delhi to Guwahati, and the five-hour road transfer to the Park gates deters people but, in recompense,

you have a wonderfully quiet wilderness experience. All that would have changed in February 2005, when Kaziranga celebrated its 100th birthday with a major international conference looking at the issues facing the Park, and related festivities. Mr Vasu confided to me that he had booked a pair of hospital beds for him and his 2-i-C for a couple of nights in order to recover, before starting the census!

I very much look forward to hearing the recommendations from the conference, and hope that one day Save the Rhino International will be able to support an aspect of the Indian rhino programme in Kaziranga, the most important stronghold for the species.

Cathy Dean, Director

Introducing the Asian Rhino Project

The Asian Rhino Project is a non-profit organisation based in Australia, which raises awareness and support for the three Asian rhinoceros species: Indian, Sumatran and Javan rhinos.

In November 2003, Sungai Dusun Sumatran Rhino Breeding Center lost its entire population of captive Sumatran Rhino due to a devastating illness. After hearing the news and learning more about the plight of the Sumatran rhino, an individual, Peter Hall,

donated Aus \$10,000 to assist Asian rhino conservation. He has continued to contribute to Sumatran Rhino conservation ever since. Hunter Hall is now our major sponsor and Peter himself has pledged a whopping one million dollars to Sumatran Rhino conservation. With Peter's support, the Asian Rhino Project has been able to grow.

Last year, Clare Campbell and I participated in the inaugural Borneo Rhino Challenge. This fundraising event set out to raise funds and awareness for Sumatran rhinos in Sabah. As a result we were able to provide SOS Rhino's Protection Units with five hand-held GPS systems, two digital cameras, two satellite phones, one diesel generator, and a 15 hp outboard motor for a boat operated by the village that "guards" the river into Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

We are proud to be working closely with other rhino organisations such as the International Rhino Foundation, SOS Rhino and Save the Rhino International - three major international rhino organisations. A Memorandum of Understanding has also been implemented between the ARP and Perth Zoo. This is a great example of organisations working together towards reaching the same goals - something we are very proud to be a part of and are keen to continue. Together we can achieve so much more!

To find out more about us, please visit our website www.asianrhinos.org.au or contact us at info@asianrhinos.org.au

Kerry Crosbie
Chairperson
Asian Rhino Project