

**THE WORLD'S SMALLEST RHINOCEROS
(*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) IN CAPTIVITY**

by
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The Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) is the smallest rhinoceros ranging in height from 1.1 to 1.3 meters at the shoulder and weighing about 1,000 kg. They are bicornual and the anterior horn can reach a length of 80 cm. Coarse, wiry hair that covers the body range in length from 2 to 9 cm. The hair is longer on the dorsal, ear extremities and limbs. They are much shorter and spiky on the flanks, shoulder, hip and side of neck. The tip of the tail ends in a tuft of hair that starts half way from the base of the tail. The two major skin folds are found at area anterior to the hip and posterior to the shoulder. These folds might serve to accomodate a more flexible mobility for such a big animal. Minor folds exist around the eyes, cheeks, neck, below the ears, forehead, behind the elbow and knee and the lower limbs.

The rhinoceros are unpredictable and move suddenly with a jerk, when wrongly approached. The two rhinoceros that I had handled in the zoo did not cause much problem when they were handled gently and cautiously. The Sumatran rhinoceros enjoys wallowing and will roll and immerse its head underwater repeatedly. In captivity, it wallows 2 or 3 times daily and each wallowing lasts 15 to 30 minutes. They do sleep if left undisturbed, especially after a hefty meal or a cool wallow. Otherwise they will spend most of their time walking, vocalizing, wallowing or feeding. I have observed these animals sleeping in the wallow.

Contrary to the popular Malay belief of 'Pekak Badak' (Deaf rhinoceros) the Sumatran rhinoceros do have a good hearing.

Lastly, with the population decreasing between 1 to 2% per annum and a long gestation period. (more than 12 months), these magnificent animals urgently need our help if their species are to be prolonged.

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