

White rhinos get giant sun bed for better skin

PHOTO EMMEN ZOO

Wijbren Landman, Emmen Zoo, the Netherlands

Sun bed treatment during grey winter months at Emmen Zoo

During the summer the female rhinos 'Jennifer' (32 years old), 'Petra' (23 years old) and 12-year-old male rhino 'Kusini' roam the large African savannah in Emmen Zoo, where they get plenty of sun throughout the day and take frequent mud baths. Their skin therefore stays in great condition for an important part of the year, but things are different in winter.



During bad weather Emmen Zoo's rhinos must spend much time in their stables. As a result they get little sun, and can not take a mud bath because it is much too cold for that. This means that the rhinoceros, especially when they get older, are sometimes troubled by flaky skin. The uppermost layer of skin does not properly come off, causing small inflammations between the two top layers. The keepers treated both female rhinoceros' skin with warm water and udder cream, but the animals seemed troubled when their skin was touched. The cream helped, but it was obviously not enough.

Custom built sun bed

A sun bed was suggested as a possible solution, as infrared and ultraviolet rays encourage circulation of blood to the skin and vitamin production, stimulating natural processes. It has been found that small cuts in the skin of horses, caused by saddles, heal much faster under the influence of infrared rays. Kylix, a company that makes various products including sun beds for horses, constructed a gigantic sun bed for the rhinos in Emmen Zoo.

Sunbathing sessions

The sun bed was set up in one of the stables so that the rhinos can sunbathe in surroundings they trust. The sun bed has 4 UV lamps of 300 Watt and en 28 IR lamps of 100 Watt. It hangs from the ceiling and can be suspended at any desired height. At a distance of fifty centimetres, the lamps have an effect equivalent to six to seven times the radiation of the sun. Treatment must therefore begin carefully, and exposure, particularly to UV, must be no longer than ten minutes per day. The keepers try to tempt the animals to come under the lamps by putting down hay and tasty treats. They keep a close eye on the rhinos, and if it goes well the animals can stay under the sun bed a little longer.

Good chances

The course of treatment, which began at the end of winter, was too short to be able to show clearly visible improvements. Next winter the rhinos will be able to go under the sun bed the entire duration of their confinement to the stables. Their skin is in perfect condition when they go inside for the winter, and thanks to the sun bed, there is a good chance it will stay that way. ●