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Brutalis was born in [Knowsley Safari Park](#) in Lancashire, England in 1977. He was one of the first white rhinos to be born in captivity in England. Unfortunately, the keepers had to remove him from his mother immediately after birth and they did not succeed in re-introducing him back to his mother. The little rhino was hand raised by his keepers. There was little known at the time about the complicated process of hand raising a rhino and Brutalis was kept away from contact with other rhinos until he was eleven years old. This meant that the poor Brutalis became strongly imprinted on humans or in other words he hardly knew he was a rhinoceros.

By the time Brutalis became an adult male at about 9 or 10 years old, he became very aggressive and violent and an increasing problem for the Safari Park. The Safari Park first tried to move him to another zoo in England, but he immediately destroyed a stable there and Brutalis was sent right back. Knowsley Safari Park despairing as to what to do with a violent rhino sold him to a Dutch animal dealer, who in turn sold him as a breeding male to [Aalborg Zoo](#), Denmark.

As soon as Brutalis arrived in Aalborg he started destroying whatever he could and in desperation Aalborg called [Givskud Zoo](#) whose facilities were larger and stronger than the ones at Aalborg to see if Givskud would accept this "mad" rhino. So, in 1990 Brutalis came to Givskud Zoo.

At the time Richard Østerballe was the curator and zoologist at Givskud Zoo and he tried for 3 years to get this misbehaving rhino to mend his ways. Lots of different ideas were tried such as: different feeding routines, putting Brutalis in with different

rhinos and other animals, but nothing worked. Brutalis was an extremely dangerous rhino attacking everybody and everything. Richard also contacted several different african rhinoceros specialists to see if they had any suggestions, but he very soon found out that they actually knew less about rhinoceros behaviour than he did!

Little or no progress was made in the 3 years and it was finally decided, in co-operation with the European Breeding Commission for rhinos, to euthanize Brutalis. Two weeks after the decision had been made, one of Richard's african contacts called and informed him that a big private game reserve named Ongava in Namibia would like to release Brutalis on the reserve and see if Africa could make a difference. At first, Richard was convinced that the offer was only a trick and that Ongava really only wanted to sell Brutalis to trophy hunters. But he decided to fly down to Namibia and check out the game reserve for himself. It turned out that Ongava really meant business, but that they did not have the finances to cover the costs of moving Brutalis.

Richard Østerballe came home from Namibia and managed to persuade the director of Givskud Zoo to finance the cost of transporting Brutalis to Ongava. In January 1994, with the co-operation of Aalborg Zoo, Brutalis was packed into a specially designed crate and flew via Frankfurt to Windhoek and then on by truck to Ongava - A 10,000 km trip which took 3 days. After a short period in their game boma (A wooden enclosure) Brutalis was released into the reserve where he quickly established a normal sized territory.

In general Brutalis did very well in Africa. Unfortunately the management in Ongava could not keep him completely away from any human contact. Luckily most of the time he was well behaved and did not harm anybody. Although over the years he did create some problems he really changed into a peaceful and calm "mad" rhino. I met Brutalis in May of 1995 in Ongava where he

had taken to sleeping on the verandah of one of the houses on the reserve. Brutalis came trotting up to the Jeep I was riding in and allowed me to pet his nose through the open window of the Jeep. At the time Ongava was worried about poachers and was considering removing Brutalis's horn to make him less attractive to them. In later years you could walk with Brutalis in the bush and almost feel protected by him. Whenever he wanted human contact he would go to Leoport Farm, where he liked to sleep under the rubber tree in the yard.

Brutalis had little interest in female rhinos, which is often the case with wrongly imprinted animals. The staff at Ongava thought for a long time that he might father an offspring but this never happened. Then in 2000 Brutalis left the territory where he had been for 6 years and challenged a neighbouring male. There was a night long fight between the two rhinos and Brutalis was killed by the other rhino.

Brutalis's end was sad but it is one of the natural hazards of being a male rhino close to other wild rhinos. Actually, when Givskud Zoo made the decision to transport Brutalis to Africa they accepted that Brutalis might die from natural causes. They were more fearful that he would injure or even kill people. I am sure that Brutalis's years in Africa were the happiest 6 years of his life. Brutalis met many people and must have had a unique life for a rhinoceros. Brutalis also became a film star and a Danish national hero! The Danes made four TV documentaries about his life and the first program in the series was aired in more than 50 countries and was broadcast by the Discovery channel.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Østerballe of the Givskud Zoo, Denmark. He provided me with details of Brutalis's life and some of the photographs of Brutalis. If you wish to learn more about Brutalis or white rhinos in general, a visit to [Givskud Zoo's website](#) is

very enlightening.

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Næsehornet brutalis er død



Givskud Zoo er netop i dag blev informeret om at det berømte næsehorn BRUTALIS som i 1994 blev sendt til Namibia i Afrika er død.

Brutalis blev født i 1977 i en engelsk zoologisk have. Hans mor ville ikke passe ham så han blev håndopfostret af dyrepassere. De følgende 16 år var han i flere forskellige zoologiske haver og endte til slut i Givskud Zoo i 1990. Brutalis var ekstrem aggressiv og i 1994 blev det besluttet, som et sidste alternativ til aflivning, at forsøge at genudsætte ham under kontrollerede forhold i et afrikansk reservat.

Efter en succesfuld transport og reintroduktion i det 300 km² store ONGAVA GAME RESERVE i det nordlige Namibia levede Brutalis i mere eller mindre harmoni med naturen og menneskene i reservatet i flere år.

Det stærkt menneskeprægede næsehorn formåede at tilpasse sig et liv i den afrikanske natur, men søgte til stadighed kontakt med mennesker. Et forhold der gennem årene viste sig både fordelagtig og problematisk for staben i reservatet. Der er dog ingen tvivl om at Brutalis levede et liv i langt større harmoni end han ville have gjort i nogen zoologisk have.



Omkring den 20 januar i år (6 årsdagen for hans ankomst til Ongava) lod Brutalis sig lokke af et brunstigt hun-næsehorn ind på en anden han-næsehorns territorium, og i den efterfølgende uundgåelige kamp om hunnen pådrog Brutalis sig så svære kvæstelser at han blev fundet død dagen efter.

En fuldstændig naturlig hændelse blev således afslutningen på Brutalis's utrolige liv. En saga der har berørt utroligt mange mennesker og forhåbentlig har været med til at skabe mere opmærksomhed omkring næsehorn og deres truede tilværelse, har hermed fået en tragisk men værdig afslutning.

[Læs Brutalis' historie her](#)

Yderligere oplysninger: Kontakt zoolog Richard Østerballe

Givskud Zoo