
RHINOS OF NEPAL AT ZSL WHIPSNADE ZOO

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Behan and Asha.

ZSL Whipsnade Zoo has been home to Greater one-horned rhinos since the 1930s and over the years has had a successful breeding programme. However, with an ageing pair of rhinos which last bred in 1989, the breeding programme was waning. So the Zoo welcomed the arrival of two young female rhinos from Chitwan National Park, Nepal in 1998. The two young rhinos, both under two years old, quickly settled into their new surroundings. They were named Beluki and Behan and soon became favourites with both staff and visitors.

As the 'girls' matured, so began the search for a suitable mate. A breeding

male, 'Jaffna' from Basle Zoo in Switzerland (born in San Diego in March 1994) was offered on loan and he arrived in July 2004. Jaffna was a very relaxed male rhino and when mixed with a female to breed, he was happy to let her do all the chasing! Eventually a successful mating took place in September 2005 and sixteen months later keepers were preparing for the big event.

Behan was under constant surveillance with CCTV cameras in her well-bedded and warm stable so the team of keepers were able to witness the normal and safe birth of a female calf at 14:00 on New Year's Eve 2006. A good bond between mother and calf was quickly established



Asha.

and Behan proved to be a natural mother protecting and nurturing her calf as if she was an experienced cow rhino.

The calf aroused a lot of interest in the local press, being the first Greater one-horned rhino calf born at Whipsnade Zoo for over 17 years. A competition to name her was run by a local television company and the name 'Asha' meaning 'hope' was selected.

Asha has gone from strength to strength. Now, nearly 2 years old, she weighs 868kgs. She is very friendly and relaxed and is inseparable from her mother and is still suckling.

In the meantime Jaffna, the male rhino



Jaffna and Behan.

had been busy and had mated Beluki in July 2006. Her calf was due in November 2007 and again preparations were made. On 5 November, fireworks day, Beluki was showing signs of early labour but staff didn't expect the calf to be born like a rocket in under 2½ hours at 12:40! The delivery was good and although it took a while the calf was up and suckling by 17:30. This was a male calf and he weighed 60kgs at birth.

Although Behan was also a good mother the calf started to become slightly lethargic a few days later. The veterinary team were called in and after several days on antibiotics, vitamins and top-up feeds the calf was back on track and putting on 1.5kgs every day. By day 5 he seemed fit and Beluki was left in soul charge. The calf was named Rap, meaning 'heat of the fire', in a competition run by a children's newspaper. He has recently had his first birthday, celebrated as it always will be in Britain, with fireworks! Rap now weighs 534kgs and is an independent young rhino who loves to get attention from his keepers and any lucky visitors.

Jaffna has now returned to Basle and Whipsnade has acquired a new male, Hugo, from Warsaw in Poland who was born in Amsterdam in December 2002. Although he is still young there are plans for him to breed with the Whipsnade females in the near future and increase the captive population of Greater one-horned rhinos. A new modern exhibit named 'Rhinos of Nepal' with indoor pools and open stabling areas has been opened this year to accommodate this growing herd. November 2008