

Security Clearance, Chicago, Nipsey Hussle: Your Tuesday Briefing



By Chris Stanford

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And now for the Back Story on ...

The difference between rhinos

We often ask readers for Back Story ideas. Zach Lewis of Chicago suggested we look at the naming of black and white rhinos, both of which are in fact gray.

They have [different faces](#). The black rhino, which tends to eat trees and bushes, has a pointed upper lip, while the grass-grazing white rhino has a broader one.



Najin, center, a female northern white rhino. Credit Sunday Alamba/Associated Press

In 2003, [Kees Rookmaaker](#), a rhino researcher, [analyzed 10 theories](#) about the names.

A popular idea was that the Afrikaans word “wyd,” or Dutch “wijd,” meaning “wide,” became “white.” “Black” was simply an easy contrast.

Some other theories: The grazing rhino looked white in grasslands; it rolled in lighter mud or was often covered in bird droppings; albinism is more common among white rhinos; and that at some point, the rhinos were noticeably lighter and darker.

The mistranslation theory was the one he found least likely. “There is no record of ‘wydrhinoceros’ in the literature,” he emailed recently, noting that Dutch speakers would have used “breed,” meaning “broad,” rather than “wijd.”

Speaking of eye-catching fauna, a new species of tarantula has become a scientific celebrity. But [the discovery has renewed an old ethical debate](#) about specimen collection and “biopiracy.”

That’s it for this briefing. See you next time.

— Chris