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Rhinoceros poaching victims
A.S. Gouwss

CHAPTER 22

Rhinoceros orphans as poaching victims – A.S. Gouwss

The incidence of rhinoceros poaching became part of the South African society in the media. Orphans from poaching cases occur and the question can be asked – what must be done with a calf protecting his mother's carcass? An exceptional lady, Petronel Nieuwoudt in the Mpumalanga Lowveld created an orphanage (Care for Wild Africa) outside Nelspruit to cater for these orphans. She compiled a protocol that is published in **Appendix 4** of this book. To date she has successfully raised eight white rhinoceros calves.

Every situation is unique when confronted with a calf still running in the wild. These calves can be aggressive and injure personnel of the rescue team. Sometimes immediate interference is necessary, e.g. when the calf was also injured and has lost body fluids or when it was dehydrated if the poaching incident happened a few days ago. When predators occur in the area the calf must be removed as soon as possible to avoid injuries.

If the calf is wounded care must be taken to stop the animal losing blood. However, the safety of personnel must be a priority when working with a wild animal. A list of emergency numbers of wildlife veterinarians, pilots and game capture units must be available at the orphanage. Enough information must be given that the support people can arrived well prepared for the crisis. Where possible try to monitor and establish temperature, heart rate, respiration rate and dehydration status before a veterinarian arrives at the scene. Avoid any noises or disturbances at the crime scene to limit the stress on the animal.

Normal Physiological Values

Rectal temperature varies from 34,5° C - 37,5° C.

Respiration rate varies from 6 - 12 breaths/minute.

Pulse is 30 - 40 beats/minute.

Defecation rate is 5 - 6 times per day.

The first step is to calm the animal with the aid of long acting tranquilizers before capture and transport. Do not inject large volumes of irritating substances into the neck of a rhinoceros due to be held in a boma. The pain when the animal moves its neck or lifts its head will discourage feeding. Cotton wool plugs in the ears of the calf before transport can also lower the stress levels. During the transport the calf must be protected against cold wind. Bedding in a secure crate will help to keep the calf's body temperature constant.

The second step at the orphanage is to get the calf over its stress from losing his mother. They must develop trust from the foster mother and must be taught to take the artificial bottle and adapt to the new milk formula. This is a process of hours sleeping with the orphans, keeping the warm and make sure that they do not get dehydrated. In the boma infra-red lights and blankets can be used to maintain a normal temperature. The calf must always rest in the

sternal position. A short acting tranquilizer, Valium (Diazepam), will stimulate the calf to feed and drink. Care must be taken not to overdose the calf with long acting tranquilizers because it will suppress the appetite. A calf with severe stress must be housed in a crate until the animal take the bottle.



Source: A Gouwss

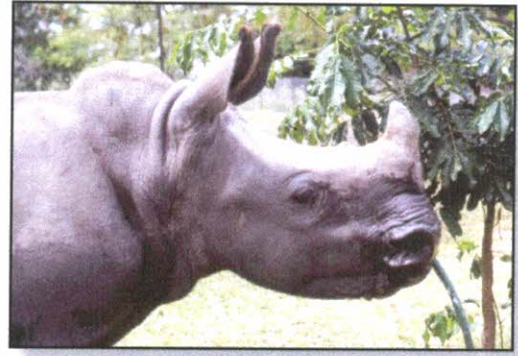
Petronel Nieuwoudt with an orphan calf

The animal must be fed at 10% of its body mass per day. A calf of 80 kg will get eight litres of milk a day. Feeding times can vary from 4 – 6 times a day. The appetite and age of the calf will determine the feeding frequency. When the calf is very small the feeding frequency is every two hours. The calf will start taking solids after two months of age. The milk must have a low fat (2%) and high lactose (6%) content. A calf has a preference on which side it will walk alongside the mother under natural conditions. The calf will prefer to suckle on that side of the mother. The artificial bottle can be offered on the side that the calf prefers. White rhinoceros are social animals and if possible must be housed with other calves as soon as the animal is settled in the boma. If another rhinoceros is not available a domestic goat can be used. When the calf will take water from a bucket electrolytes and vitamins can be added with the water. The calves are weaned at an age of 18 months.

The rhinoceros has the same gastro-intestinal system as the horse. The caecum is enlarged to make the rhinoceros a hindgut fermenter. Good quality hay (teff and lucerne) with horse cubes is the food of choice in captivity. The solid food intake is 2.5% of the animal's body weight. Feeding of cubes with high doses of coccidiostats (Salinomycin) should be avoided as this substance is highly toxic to rhinoceros. Make sure the hay is not mouldy to prevent

colic. Game cubes (antelope cubes) which include cotton products will contain gossypol, which is potentially toxic to single-stomach animals such as a rhinoceros.

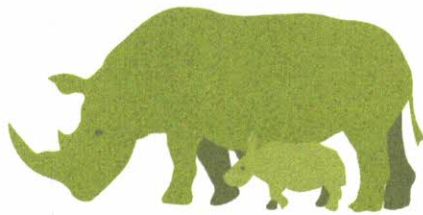
Hindgut fermenters tend to eat their own specie's dung to supplement vitamins and minerals in their diet. Dung of an adult rhinoceros can be used to make a cold tea extract and fed to the young calf. The stools of the calf must be monitor. Check the faeces for consistency, colour, smell, mucus or worms.



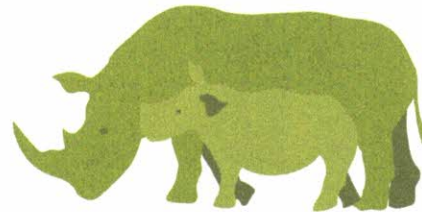
Calf - drinking from water pipe

The boma for a white rhinoceros calf must be 20 x 20 meters and a black rhinoceros calf 10 x 10 meters. Shade must be available and the floor must be sandy for good drainage. Create a mud wallow in one corner of the boma, if the boma is large enough. Mud seals and prevents maggot infestation of small wounds and gives the animal a good skin quality.

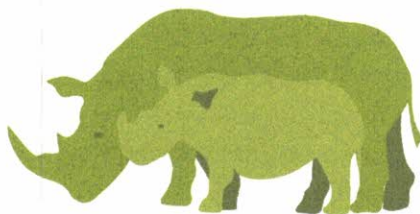
Estimated age of calves under field conditions (see Figure 22.1 - 22.4 below):
Shoulder height of calf compared to its mother —



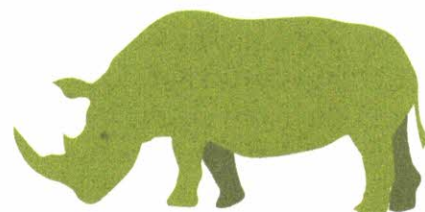
$\frac{1}{4}$ still nursing



$\frac{1}{2}$ weaned



$\frac{3}{4}$ sub-adult



$\frac{4}{4}$ adult

Source: J Ackermann