

Black Rhinoceros

Diceros bicornis

Classification

There are four subspecies of black rhinoceros, all of which are classified as critically endangered or as probably extinct.

Class: Mammalia

Order: Perissodactyla

Family: Rhinocerotidae

Genus: *Diceros*

Species: *bicornis*

Distribution

Historically the black rhinoceros occurred in Africa from 10 degrees North to the tip of South Africa.

Currently they are found only in scattered pockets of Africa from the Cape to Somalia, typically in protected areas or reserves.

Habitat

Scrublands, tropical and subtropical grasslands, montane forests, savannas.

Physical Description

- Black rhinos are 10.8-12.0 feet (3.3-3.6 m) long.
- They weigh 1,760-3,080 pounds (800-1,400 kg). Males are slightly larger than females.
- They stand 60-63 inches (152-161 cm) at the shoulder.
- The skin of the black rhino is dark gray or dark brown, not black.
- They have two horns on the nose. The larger anterior horn can average one-and-a-half feet (0.5 m) long.
- They have a large head, short neck and short, thick legs.
- Prehensile, pointed upper lip

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Twigs and leaves, bulbs and grasses.

At the zoo: Alfalfa hay, grain and a vitamin-mineral supplement.

What Eats It?

Calves are subject to predation by lions and hyenas. Adults are hunted by humans for their horns, which are used as a traditional medicine in some Asian countries.

Social Organization

Black rhinos are largely solitary animals except for mating pairs and females with calves. Rhinos that share the same territory will tolerate others nearby, but may be territorial at times.

Life Cycle

Females are mature at about five to six years; males at seven to eight years. After a gestation of 15-16 months, females give birth to a single calf weighing 75-110 pounds (35-50 kg), which the mother raises on her own. Calves are weaned at about two and a half years but may remain with the mother up for two to three years until the next calf is born. Females may stay with the mother longer than three years. Lifespan in the wild is 35-50 years, and in captivity extends to 45 years.

Adaptations

Nose Horns

The rhino's horn is its most distinctive feature. The word rhinoceros comes from the Greek words for nose and horn. Rhinos are the only animals with horns located on the nose not on the top of the head. The horns of cattle, sheep and antelopes have a bony core but rhino horn is composed entirely of keratin fibers tightly packed together. Rhino horns, which grow continuously, are used to dig up the ground to get mineral salts and also used as weapons when fighting.

Up on Your Toes!

Rhinos walk on their toes! They have three toes with a soft pad under the toes that helps cushion their enormous weight. Although they are large bulky animals they can actually run up to 35 miles per hour over short distances.

Acacia Leaves Please

Black rhinos are browsers. They eat twigs and leaves rather than the grasses preferred by grazing animals like the white rhino. Black rhino are particularly fond of acacia and euphorbias (ex: boxwood, spurge & jojoba). They have a prehensile upper lip which helps them grab and strip woody plants. If their preferred foods are unavailable they may eat grass using their upper lip like a hook to rip up clumps of grass.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.

Due to their slow reproductive rate and the continuing threat of poaching, the black rhino is critically endangered. In 1970 there were an estimated 100,000 black rhinos but today there are only about 3700 animals left. Although some black rhinos are slowly making a comeback in well-protected areas, they continue to be poached in unprotected areas for their horn which is used in traditional Chinese medicine and in Yemen for dagger handles. Black rhinos are also threatened by habitat loss. Today there are only about 200 black rhinos in captivity.

Fun Facts

- Rhinos are the only animals with horns on their noses rather than on the top of the head.
- With small eyes placed on the side of the head, rhinos are very nearsighted and will charge at trees, rocks and vehicles until they get close enough to determine if the object is a threat.
- Rhinos make a variety of sounds including snorts, roars, squeals, honks and puffing sounds.
- Although ancient rhinos once roamed North America, the five remaining rhino species are only found in Africa and Asia.

