

# White Rhinoceros



ABQ BioPark  
Zoo

Information Guide



## SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS *Ceratotherium simum simum*

**Order:** Perissodactyla

**Family:** Rhinocerotidae

**Range or distribution:** Eastern and Southern Africa.

**Habitat:** Open savannas and grasslands; swamps during dry season

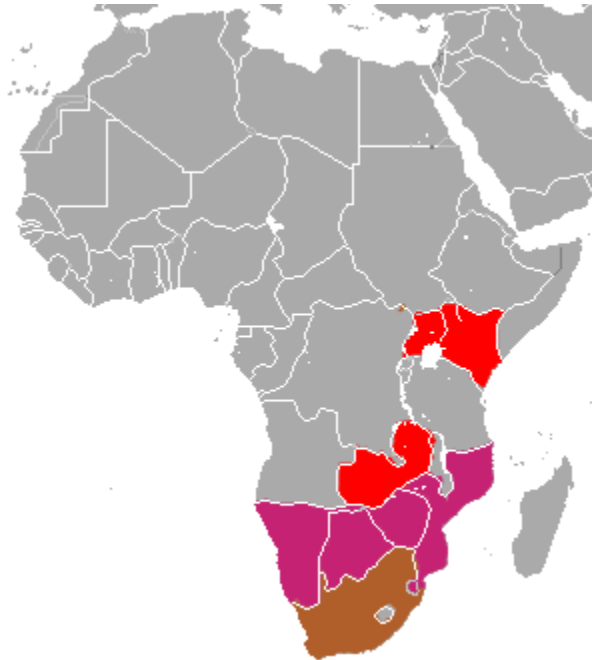
**Diet:** Herbivore. Grazes on short turf grasses and low shrubs of the savannah.

**Lifespan:** 25 to 30 years in the wild; up to 45 years in zoos

**Size:** Length 13 to 17 feet.  
Height 5-7 feet. Weight 3200 to 8000 pounds

**Behavior:** Often cover themselves with a layer of mud that acts as both bug repellent and sun block. Usually sociable, placid and even-tempered. Because they are very near-sighted, they often charge when startled. Dominant bulls are usually solitary and will confront any invading bull. White rhinos tend to congregate into a small family group in a loosely defined territory. Adult males are territorial. Mostly diurnal, spending ½ day feeding, 1/3 day resting, and the remainder walking around, standing alert, or wallowing. They are most active at dawn and dusk. A high step trot is normally the fastest gait at 18 mph. They have the ability to gallop at 25 to 30 mph.

A white rhino will drink twice a day if water is available, but if conditions are dry it can live for four or five days without drinking. Dominant bulls mark their territory with excrement and urine. The dung is laid in well-defined piles, called middens; there may be 20 to 30 middens to mark a given territory. As pure grazers, white rhinos play an integral part in the southern African grassland ecosystem. Seed dispersal and the hindering of woody plant encroachment are important parts of their role in the grasslands.



**Adaptations:** Thick skin, like armor, to move thru thorny shrubs. Wide, square shaped mouth with flexible broad lips for “mowing” grasses. Their short legs, long head reaching almost to the ground, and wide mouth are used in combination with a side-to-side head movement to eat massive quantities of grass. Rhinos lack canines and incisors. Rhinos have excellent hearing. They will swivel their ears to pinpoint sound; the ears move independently and are usually in motion. Acute sense of smell. The olfactory passages which are responsible for smell are larger than their entire brain. Rhinos have a massive hump of muscle on their necks, to hold up a large head that can weigh 800 to 1000 pounds. A rhino’s horn is not a true horn that is attached to the skull. It grows from the skin and is made up of keratin fibers, the same material found in hair and nails. Rhinos generally have no natural predators due to their massive size and tough skin; however the young may be preyed on by large carnivores. Rhinos are perissodactyls (odd toed ungulates), with three toes. The middle toe supports most of their weight.

**Reproduction:** Gestation is 17 to 18 months. Females reproduce only every 2 ½ to 5 years. Their single calf does not live on its own until it is about 3 years old. Females reach sexual maturity at 6 years; males at 10 to 12 years.

**Status:** CITES: Appendix II  
IUCN: Near Threatened (Southern population)

Three of the five species -- the (Indian, Javan and Sumatran Black Rhinoceros) -- are critically endangered, as is the Northern White. The Southern White is registered as Vulnerable, with roughly 14,500 remaining in the wild.

The northern population is critically endangered and may be extinct in the wild.

During the European exploration of Africa, the white rhino was actually less numerous than the black rhino. Today, because of careful management in the Republic of South Africa, the southern white rhino population has increased dramatically. South Africa is home to about 80% of the world’s population of white rhinos.

## Threats to Rhinoceros Survival

- **Poaching for the horn, skin, and meat-** The horn is used for traditional art and medicine. However, there has been no scientific evidence of health benefits. In an effort to protect rhinos, some preserves remove rhino horns to deter poachers.

**“The unfounded rumour that rhino horn can cure cancer most likely sealed the fate of the last Javan rhino in Vietnam. This same problem is now threatening other rhino populations across Africa and South Asia.” – Dr. A. Christy Williams, WWF, *Rhino horn demand leads to record poaching***

- **Habitat destruction and urbanization**
- **Drought** - The drought kills the plants on which rhinos browse; since white rhinos do not have a large home range, a widespread drought can be devastating.
- **Human Conflict**-Political disruptions in some African countries have weakened many conservation efforts.



## Why should we care if the Rhino goes extinct?

The rhinoceros is one of the largest land mammals in the world. It coexists peacefully with other species other than man within its habitats around the world.



## What can I do to help Rhinos?

- **Support eco-tourism.** Species like the rhino can be saved if their tourism value is used to help them coexist with human populations.
- **Support breeding programs in zoos.** Through the efforts of governments and zoos (like the ABQ BioPark!), the Southern white rhinoceros is recovering in numbers.
- **Don't buy products made with rhino horn.**

Sources: Smithsonian magazine, Wikipedia, CITES *web site*

Learn more at: <http://www.rhinoconservation.org/>

