

Albuquerque BioPark Exclusive Rhino Keeper Interview (2020)

1. Who are the BioPark's rhinoceros?

Bertha is our current 34 year old female. Chopper is our current 6 year old male and was brought to the ABQ BioPark as a baby. They are getting harder to tell apart since Chopper is grown-up now and weighs about the same as Bertha; around 4000 pounds!

Bertha really took to Chopper from the beginning – she was very interested in him and “adopted” him in a sense. Bertha chose to take on a mothering role, and for this reason Bertha and Chopper are still at the BioPark together today.

2. What are they fed?

They are fed two types of hay; timothy hay and oats, sometimes grain. We also give them a “mush-ball” every day made of bananas and any supplements that the rhinos need.

The most consistent thing they like to eat is the “browse” (branches with leaves) which they get on a daily basis after they eat their hay. They love their browse!

3. What types of enrichment items do rhinos get?

They get big stuff. Things like giant balls and plastic trash bins. One thing they really like is a pallet of sod (grass). Chopper likes to dig in the sod with his lips. They also like big wallows to roll in – that is a staple along with big log piles. If I put boxes in there Chopper will eat them.

Above: enrichment items such as plastic bins and giant balls.

4. How are the rhinos cared for physically?

Mainly they just get their daily supplements and vitamins. Our rhinos get iron supplements and we frequently do blood draws to test for iron levels and make sure they are maintained. Bertha also gets medicine drops in her eyes. We weigh them one time per month using a giant scale which the rhinos have been trained to step onto. We make sure that their weight is not dropping or increasing dramatically and will adjust their diets if necessary.

5. How are the animals you care for involved in conservation work or education?

We fundraise each year to raise money for Sumatran rhinos; the most endangered species of rhino with only about 80 left living in the wild. Chopper and Bertha are both white rhinos, which are classified as near-threatened. Their presence at the BioPark helps us to teach about all 5 species of rhino. All species of rhinoceros need better protection in the wild from habitat loss and poaching.

Thank you for spreading awareness, protecting nature, and supporting your Albuquerque BioPark! We hope you enjoyed reading some of our insider information.