

# Vanishing Animals

Art

Andy Warhol

Text

Kurt Benirschke

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Only with some trepidation did I decide to include the Sumatran rhinoceros in this book. After all, there is no zoo in which the reader might see one. The last captive specimen, a female, died in the Copenhagen Zoo in 1973. And perhaps as few as 100 of these prehistoric-looking animals are supposed to be left in the five widely separated areas of Sumatra that are its home. For this reason, an international coalition is presently about that is encouraging the collection of funding to help pay the exceedingly careful costs of . . . But the status of the rhinoceros is not as widely distributed as over Sumatra. Brunei, Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand will all have to cope with the problem. The rhinoceroses are held by all five rhinoceros parks.

## Sumatra's Rhinoceros

(*Dicorhinus sumatrensis*)

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The main problems of rhinos are that they are large and that they possess horns. This size requires that they have a lot of protein in their diet and because they have relatively inferior eyesight they are easy targets for today's high-powered rifles. It is difficult to understand, however, why rhino horns which consist of flattened hair like material should be so valued as a status symbol in a country where the rhino is rarely held in any appreciation. It is most desired as a medicine against malaria in some Oriental cultures. Here one may obtain powdered rhino horns at half weight for about the price of 100 mg of aspirin, but the most remarkable consumption of horns has come from the recently oil-rich Iran, Venice, who find rhino horn the macho man's thing from which to fashion elaborately carved sheaths for their daggers. All this has led to an alarming decrease in all rhino species.

In Africa two species are threatened and face much mean black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) whose population is down to 6,000 from 13,000 in 1980, and the white or square lipped rhino (*Coelothrinax immanis*). When I visited their hot country of Natal, I found a concentration of rhinos in the cause of the severe pressure being experienced by this species, we transported 20 animals to our San Diego Wild Animal Park in 1977. From these we have raised 55 offspring. It is now the only species that has increased in the wild from about 1,000 in 1980 to about 4,000 at the present time.

(Above) Sumatran rhinoceros, adult female at Copenhagen Zoo (by permission)



The three remaining rhino species are Asian. The largest and best known is the Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) which was the first rhino to be exhibited in Europe. It prefers swampy grounds, has what appears to be an armour on its exterior, and it is well managed in India as well as in zoos, with a total population of over 1,000 specimens. Next there is the Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*), so elusive a creature that even few photographs of it exist. The Javan rhino is confined to the peninsula Ujung Kulon, and the best estimate suggests that there are about 50 individuals still exist. Stringent laws against poaching and protection of its habitat are all we can hope for at pres-

ent. The situation for the third Asian species, the Sumatran rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus (Dacryrhinus) sumatrensis*, is a little different. Estimates put its surviving numbers at about 300, but one student who recently tried to observe it spent over a year on its trail without observing a single specimen! It lives dispersed in the thick jungles of Sumatra and is extraordinarily difficult to follow and study. Moreover, the trees that comprise its jungle have been so defoliated by becoming furniture, packing crates, building material, and firewood that perhaps it is because its habitat is degraded that conservationists recently have become interested in it. Or perhaps it is because it is the only truly woolly species, or perhaps because we feel a homed-in having let the fact to make captive, the unfulfilled. Whatever

the reasons for the upsurge in interest, and despite the fact that over 30 of the 40 animals have reached European zoos in years past, the success with keeping Sumatran rhinos in captivity has been dismal. The relatively long survival of the Copenhagen specimen was due in large part to the sandy exhibit space in which it was kept and to the attentive efforts of its keeper. It was only through his observation that the rhino coped with the allalta was discovered. Outlines of all aspects of food had failed to stimulate her appetite. But when the keeper noticed her intently sniffing the air as some fresh cut allalta was being driven by the harrier was broken. She later specialized in eating leaves of fresh bread and anal allalta and ripe apples. An increase in the success of the opportunity to follow

more tale of the part dealing with rhinos with rhinoceroses.

We believe that the transition from one species to another during the course of evolution is accompanied by a change in form, some number and structure. Small wonder then that we were interested in the Sumatran rhinoceros which is believed to be the most primitive of the five rhino species. In the early 1960s I was invited to visit the Copenhagen Zoo to examine the rhino. I was there in 1960 and the rhino was being housed in a small enclosure. How does one get a blood sample or a fresh biopsy from a

(Bobbi) and I, in the morning, to the rhino at the Copenhagen Zoo. In the evening, the rhino was in the enclosure.

rhinoceros? We enlisted the help of the late Dr. William T. Schauer, chairman of the Rhino Specialists Group of the IUCN. He proposed to the Copenhagen Zoo director that I be allowed to take a biopsy for study. On the appointed day in June 1969 I was greeted at the Hamburg airport by Schauer, who told me the deal was off. The Copenhagen director, he told me, had said it was impossible. I was, however, haunted by Schauer's pessimism and I still went to Copenhagen. Yet despite my best efforts at persuasion (enhanced by much whiskey) the zoo director remained skeptical. But the long-time keeper was more accessible, and so in the early hours of the next morning, armed with buckets of apples and boxes of fresh bread, the keeper and I stole into the enclosure. Appearing to the animal with apples, the keeper kept the rhino occupied while I took out my alcohol sponges in order to cleanse the soft skin behind the ears. Then, on a prearranged signal—I reached out with my weapon, and took the biopsy. The rhino, mercifully, took off in one direction while we took off in the other, biopsy in hand. The weapon concealed until the last minute was of all things, an old-fashioned forceps used by mine diggers to take biopsies from the tough tissue of a woman's cervix.

Sumatran rhinos are solitary animals in the wild, rarely traveling with any other rhino, except their young. They are superbly adapted to swampy forests and prefer to frequent the 500 m radius around their beloved mud

wallow. Krumbiegel's observation that in favor of other rhino sleeps with a rhino under its head. At the Copenhagen did populations remain in Sabah and Kalimantan contain only a few Sumatran rhinos and a limited. Add to this the fact that the animal and its habitat are understood why the rhino has recently been judged to be the most of juvenile footprints. Its last retreat is in reserve (6,000 square kilometers) and conservationists at least represents a future breeding.

In the early eighties together to map out a proposal to the Malaysian for the capture of 10 rhinos for safekeeping. The negotiations that were an agreement in 1970 rhinos were captured by Game Department on exhibit in the Malaysia. However, at writing the government (Malaysia) has not a titration of any animals equipped and modern zoos. And indeed, one-half of the 300 rhinos years ago have been destroyed or the rhino also an assured practically all of the



the upsurge in interest that over 300 have reached Europe at the success with rhinos in captivity. The relatively few Copenhagen specimens apart to the satisfaction of its keeper. For it is his observations that henceforth will be a warning of all types of keeper noticed her the air as some freshly being driven by the bar. She later specialized in fresh bread and buckwheat. And once again this opportunity to tell one

more tale of the past, although in course with the rhinos.

We believe that the rhino from one species to another during the course of evolution is a simple matter, a change in chromosomal structure. Small wonder that they were interested in the similarity of rhinos which is reinforced by the most primitive of the true rhinos, those of the early days. Several illustrations of the rhinos in the mammal collection in 1960 and have since been a well-defined discipline. A single female Sumatran rhino was being exhibited at the Copenhagen zoo. How does one get a blood sample from a rhino?

(Below) Family of Southern white rhinos at San Diego's Wild Animal Park in San Francisco (R. Garrison, San Diego Zoo)



rhino? We enlisted the help of the late Dr. William F. Schauerte, chairman of the Rhino Specialists Group of the IBC. He proposed to the Copenhagen Zoo director that I be allowed to take a biopsy. On the appointed day in June 1969 I was met at the Harbor airport by Schauerte, who told me the deal was off. The Copenhagen director and I had said that it was impossible. I was, however, undaunted by Schauerte's pessimism and I flew to Copenhagen. Yet despite my best efforts at persuasion, unbacked by much whiskey, the director remained skeptical. But the long-time keeper was more accessible and so in the early hours of the next morning, armed with buckets of apples and loaves of Irish bread, the keeper and I slide into the enclosure. Approaching the animal with apples, the keeper kept the rhino occupied while I took out my alcohol sponges in order to cleanse the soft skin behind the ear. Then, on a prearranged signal, I reached out with my weapon and took the biopsy. The rhino momentarily took off in one direction while we took off in the other, biopsy in hand. The weapon concealed until the last minute was of all things an old-fashioned hair clip used by gynecologists to take biopsies from the tough tissue of a woman's cervix.

Sumatran rhinos are solitary animals in the wild, rarely traveling with any other rhinos except their young. They are superbly adapted to swampy forests and prefer to frequent the 500 m radius or so of their belved mud

wallow. Krumbiegel makes the unusual observation that in contrast to the behavior of other rhino species, this animal sleeps with a front leg extended under its head. At least the specimen in Copenhagen did. The few scattered populations remaining in Burma, Thailand, Sabah, and West Malay, in each contain only a few dozen or less of Sumatran rhinos and they are widely separated. Admittedly, the solitary nature of the animal and it will be easy to understand why non-reproductive success has resulted, being possible. This is subject to the care of the absence of justifiable support in recent years. Its last retreat is in the northern Uluenger reserve (6,000 square kilometers) which contains between 30 and 40 animals and conservationists hope that this at least represents a viable population for future breeding.

In the early eighties, I went back together to map out a last ditch formal proposal to the Malaysian government for the capture of 12 pairs of Sumatran rhinos for safekeeping, surveys commenced that were followed by endless negotiations that eventually ended with an agreement in 1981. Indeed some rhinos were captured by the Malaysian Game Department and one male is now an exhibit in the Malacca Zoo of Malaysia. However, at the time of this writing the government of Sabah (East Malaysia) has not agreed to the exportation of any animal to even the best equipped and most cooperative West German zoo. And indeed in Sabah over one half of the 30 rhinos existing 5 years ago have been poached while the destruction of the remaining forests is also an assured prospect. At one time practically all of the Malaysian peninsula

was tropical forest. Now only 55% remains and of this, one third has now been logged. Habitat destruction is as we have seen, a major cause of most animal endangerment. This is certainly the case for the Sumatran rhino. The two opposing forces in the conservation debate, *in situ* and *ex situ*—must look on while border and black-footed ferret and perhaps the Sumatran rhino population dwindle in the wild to unsustainably small numbers. How much better we can see is the prospect for the great Indian and the white rhinoceroses whose enlightened management, translocation and placement into secure national parks and zoological gardens has given us hope that our children will someday be able to behold these truly spectacular relics of bygone days.