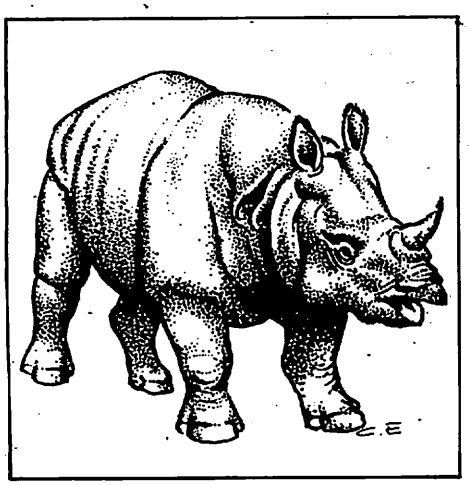
RHINOS OF THE WORLD

The rhinoceros or rhino, with its almost prehistoric appearance, is one of the world's most magnificent creatures. Unfortunately the five existing species of rhino are also included in the group of animals most threatened with extinction.

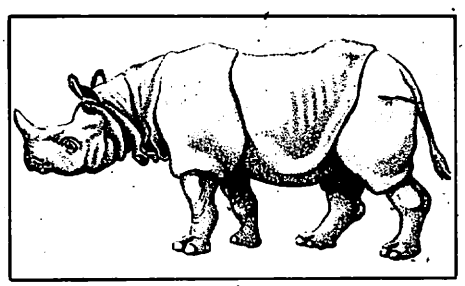
Although the different species of rhino look similar and originally descended from a single common ancestor, they represent two evolutionary lines which split tens of millions of years ago. One line led to the one-horned rhino, seen today as the primitive Javan rhino and the more advanced Indian species. The second led to the two-horned type, the Sumatran rhino being a true descendant, but about 10 million years ago, a branch found its way to Africa and eventually separated into the Black and White rhino. Both African rhinos evolved to feed without cutting teeth—present in all three Asian species—while their long, sharp horns became important for defence.



1. **Javan rhino**
(Rhinoceros sondaiacus)
This forest-dweller uses its pre-hensile upper lip to browse in a manner similar to the African Black rhino. Also called the Lesser One-Horned Rhino, it is the older of the one-horned species—fossil deposits of over a million years old have confirmed that the animal's modern form is identical to its ancestor.

The Javan rhino has a scaly skin with a mosaic appearance, folds on the neck and folds on the shoulders which are joined in the midline of the back giving the body a segmented look, rather like a scaly anteater. A small horn is found exclusively in males while females have only a small knob.

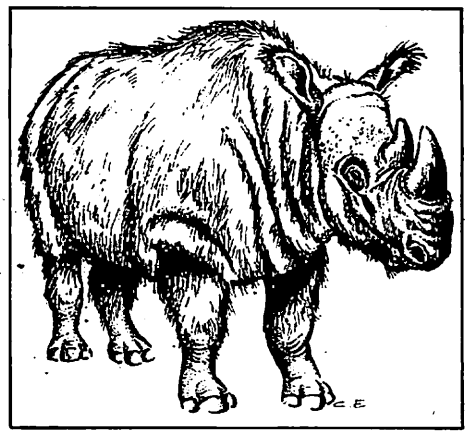
The decline of the Javan rhino began in the mid-eighteenth century as a result of poaching, bounty-hunting to protect crops and hunting for medicinal purposes. Today the Javan rhino is found in only two localities, one in Java and the other in Vietnam, with a current population of 50 animals.



2. **Indian rhino**
(Rhinoceros unicornis)
Often referred to as the Great Indian or Greater One-Horned Rhino, this rhino is found primarily in northern India with smaller populations in Nepal and Pakistan.

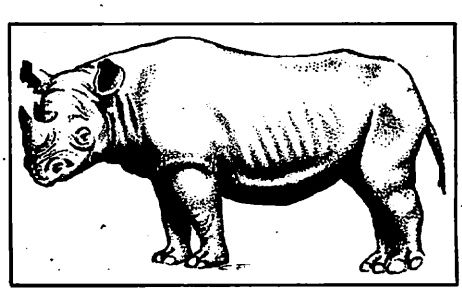
The largest of the Asian species, this rhino is predominantly a grazer but can gather tall grass using its pre-hensile lip, normally tucked out of the way for cropping short grass. The skin is knobbly giving the animal a tough, "riveted" appearance, yet still as soft and penetrable as any other hide.

The clearing of land for tea plantations in India, especially in Assam, was responsible for the demise of this species. In the 1970s the continued decline in Nepal were reported to be poaching, fighting between individuals, mothers abandoning calves and calves killed by tigers. Current figures are listed at approximately 1 500.



3. **Sumatran rhino**
(Dicerorhinus sumatrensis)
The smallest of all existing species, the Sumatran rhino has evolved virtually unchanged from a woolly ancestor, shown by its fairly hairy coat (especially in younger animals) and tufts of hair around its ears. As such the Sumatran rhino, also known as the Two-Horned Asian Rhino, is often regarded as the most primitive species of the family existing today. It is well equipped with a pre-hensile upper lip, front teeth and low, crowned molars for browsing on forest vegetation.

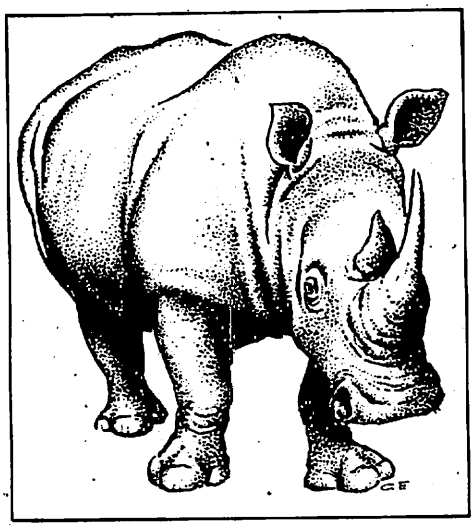
Clearing of land for rubber plantations in Malaysia reduced the feeding grounds and breeding territories of the rhino, resulting in its decline, although many animals were also hunted or poached. A total of about 200 animals can be found scattered throughout Malaysia, Burma (Manyanmar), Thailand and Indonesia.



4. **Black rhino**
(Diceros bicornis)
The Black rhino, alternatively known as the prehensile-lipped rhinoceros, is a browser and considered to be the more primitive of the two African species.

In the last 20 years the Black rhino population has crashed largely due to poachers who, unchallenged by governmental inefficiency and economic and political discord, continue with their illicit activities in order to meet the demand for rhino horn in Asia and the Middle East.

There are four known sub-species of Black rhino, namely, *Diceros bicornis, D.b. minor, D.b. michaeli, and D.b. chobiensis.* With a total population of less than 3 500 animals, Black rhino are still found in Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa as well as a few other East and Central African states.



5. **White rhino**
(Ceratotherium simum)
The African White rhino is thought to have separated from the Black rhino four to five million years ago to evolve into a more advanced grazing species. No more white than the Black rhino is black, its name is derived from the corruption of "weit", the Afrikaans word for wide, which refers to the broadly shaped mouth. It is also commonly called the square-lipped rhino.

At the turn of the 20th century, when there were thought to be less than 100 White rhino left in South Africa, the Natal parks authorities intervened. The population increased so successfully under protection that, in the 1960s, "Operation Rhino" successfully relocated White rhinos to other parts of Africa as well as zoos in order to establish alternative breeding herds.

The northern and southern subspecies of White rhino *(Ceratotherium simum cottoni* and *C.s.simum* respectively) appear to differ only in their geographical areas, rather than appearance and way of life. Of the current total White rhino population numbering 4 500–5 000, approximately 4 700 are found in South Africa, with isolated populations in Zimbabwe and Garamba National Park, Zaire.

Illustrations–Courtesy of Custos Magazine. Vol. 16, No. 6.

RHINO ORPHAN MAKES HISTORY

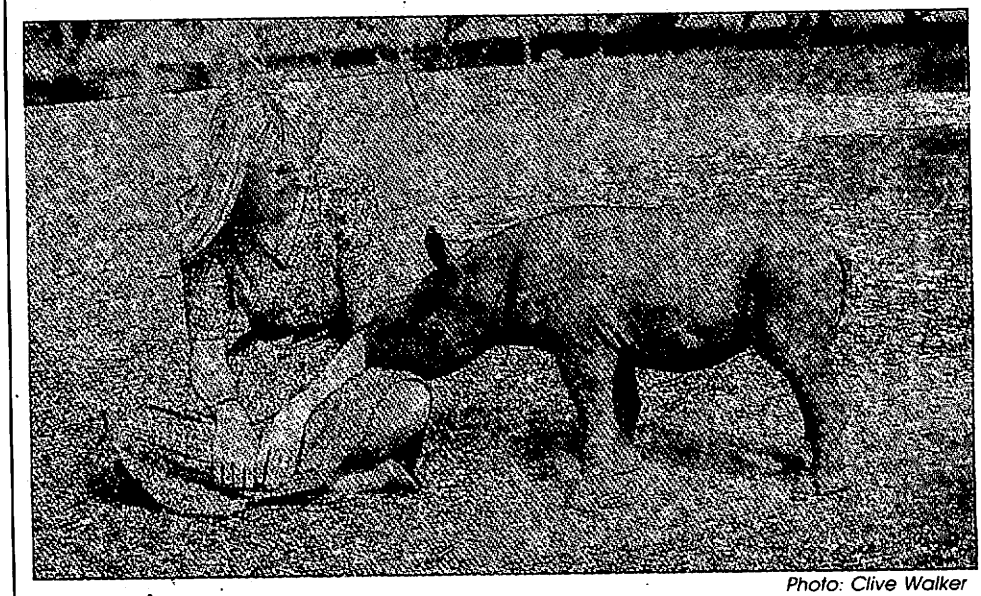


Photo: Clive Walker

Makoko is one of the group of five Black rhino recently purchased by Dale Parker at the Natal Parks Board game auction. Realising she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, Makoko was therefore the first rhino to be released from the holding pen into Lapalala Wilderness to give her ample time to adapt to her new surroundings. But on 11 July 1992, just over a week later, she gave birth to a 21 kilogram bull calf.

Returning from a morning game drive, a manager and his group of guests came across the tiny rhino on a steep dirt road, apparently alone and abandoned. When no trace was found of his mother, the starving and dehydrated baby rhino was immediately taken back to camp for safekeeping.

Everyone sprang into action to save the little rhino, aptly christened Bwana Tshiwana–"Mr Orphan". Karen and Roy Trendler from the Animal Rehabilitation Centre (ARC), together with a vet and an emergency supply of colostrum, met little Bwana and his entourage from Lapalala at Nylstroom. *Colostrum, a substance found only in mother's milk, is vital in the first few hours of life to enable new born babies to build some internal resistance to disease and infection.*

By 6.00 pm that evening the small rhino had safely arrived at the Onderstepoort Veterinary facility.

Little Bwana was believed to be at least a month premature and, as with many premature births, there was no lack of complications–the umbilical cord had not been properly severed and an infection developed, nearly leading to his death in the few weeks which followed. The rhino calf also contracted a bacterial infection which severely affects joints and had to be treated with strong drugs to ease pain and stiffness.

Based on information supplied from Kenya by both Anna Merz of the Ngare Sergoi rhino sanctuary and Daphne Sheldrick of the Nairobi Animal Orphanage, as well as scientific papers on the composition of rhino mothers milk, the correct formula was finally mixed. After five weeks little Bwana weighed in at a healthy 37 kg–almost double his birthweight!–and was showing signs of improving by the day under the care of Karen Trendler.

ARC will be looking after the new arrival for many months to come, at least until he is about 18 months old. As for the little rhino he knows no other parents except for the humans who care for him. But the day will come when Bwana is strong enough to return to Lapalala Wilderness.

Bwana has made history as the first Black rhino to be raised in captivity in South Africa. All the records and notes kept by Karen since her involvement, and daily monitoring of the calve's progress will prove to be invaluable in the future rearing of rhino calves orphaned in the wild.

On behalf of little Bwana we wish to thank ARC and the veterinarians concerned for all their time and effort dedicated to saving this little Black rhino and for giving him a fighting chance against the odds.