

## Sumatran Rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*)

Smaller and furrier than other rhino species, the Sumatran rhinoceros is believed to be the closest and only surviving relative of the extinct woolly rhinoceros, which ranged throughout Europe and Asia during the Pleistocene epoch. Historically, Sumatran rhinos could be found from the foothills of the Himalayas in Bhutan and northeastern India, through southern China (Yunnan), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and the Malay Peninsula, as well as the islands of Sumatra and Borneo in Indonesia. By the late 1980s, however, fewer than 800 remained. It was at this point that a concerted effort was made to establish a captive population, with the Bronx, San Diego, and Los Angeles zoos leading the way in the United States.

Knowledge gained from zoo husbandry of Sumatran rhinos helped lead the way to a major milestone last year—the birth of the first calf at the Sumatran Rhinoceros Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park in Indonesia.

Funding from the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens helps support the International Rhino Foundation and its local partner, Rhino Foundation of Indonesia (Yayasan Badak Indonesia or YABI), to further the advances made

by zoos. These groups establish and maintain anti-poaching patrols called Rhino Protection Units (RPUs) and pursue field research to help us better understand these charismatic animals. Because successful conservation programs rely on community support, IRF also implements outreach programs that offer education and training so that local people can find sustainable livelihoods.

Despite these strides, fewer than 100 Sumatran rhinos remain in fragmented habitat on the islands of Indonesia and Malaysia, and the number has fallen dramatically in recent years with the rapid increase in poaching that is decimating all rhino species, which simply cannot reproduce at a high enough rate to offset these losses. Roughly 10 Sumatran rhinos remain in captivity, and only two reside in the U.S.—Suci and her brother, Harapan, who recently returned to Cincinnati Zoo after 18 months at Los Angeles Zoo. Efforts are ongoing to import an unrelated male to mate with Suci and continue the U.S. breeding program.

Many groups—local, international, public and private—are struggling to preserve this species, but these efforts have been less than unified. “The biggest challenge with the Sumatran rhino is getting all the concerned parties working

together,” comments Curator of Mammals Jeff Holland, who in April attended the Sumatran Rhino Crisis Summit, an emergency meeting that ended on an uncertain note. “If this does not happen, this species will disappear within the next ten to 20 years.”

—Sandy Masuo



## White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*)

The most abundant of the five living species, the white rhino has seen its numbers rebound dramatically over the last 100 years, from an all-time low of a few hundred individuals to today's estimated population of 20,600 (mostly in South Africa).

The downside to this good news is that the white rhino's classification as “threatened” meant that unlike Sumatran, Javan, Indian, and black rhinos, it wasn't covered by the provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which prohibits hunting or trade of endangered species. “Right now it is legal to buy a permit to hunt a white rhino in Africa,” says Adam Eyres, coordinator of the White Rhino Species Survival Plan (SSP).

The United States is a major center for the rhino horn trade, and products often move through this country en route to Asian destinations. Without genetic testing, it is virtually impossible to differentiate between horns of black and white rhinos. This difficulty has allowed wildlife traffickers to intentionally mislabel rhino horns and horn products.

In an attempt to close this loophole, in

September the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service granted the white rhino inclusion under the ESA. Under the “similarity of appearance” provision, the new ruling gives the white rhino the same protections as its less numerous cousins. “They are trying to stop the infiltration of black rhino horn, to make it so that a person cannot bring those in falsely as white rhino horn, which, until now, didn't have to play by the same rules,” Eyres explains.

Efforts are also underway to develop DNA tests that would enable enforcement agents to positively ID horn or horn products. “If they can match the DNA in a confiscated horn to a poached animal in the wild, that's definitive. And then they can arrest the person who had it in his possession.”

Meanwhile, white rhinos have thrived in U.S. zoos, with The Wilds in Ohio, San Diego Safari Park, and Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo among the most successful at breeding the species. Today there are more than 150 white rhinos held at AZA institutions, including many of the original founder animals imported in the 1960s. “When



I started in this business, life expectancy was about 35; now we have animals that are almost 50,” Eyres says, adding that the SSP has issued numerous breeding recommendations to make up for the anticipated loss of some of these aged animals.

“There's a lot of stuff going on,” he concludes, referring to the collective efforts to preserve and protect rhinos. “And it's all good.”

—Brenda Posada