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# Safari Guides

## Larger Animals of East Africa

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# Black Rhinoceros

Order:            Family            Genus & Species  
*Perissodactyla*    *Rhinocerotidae*    *Diceros bicornis*

**Identification** - A relic of prehistoric times the rhinoceros is almost unmistakable. The Black Rhino is distinguished from the slightly larger White Rhino, by the narrow mouth and prehensile upper lip. The head is large and carries two horns, the larger front horn measuring on average 60 cms., although individuals with a front horn over twice that length have been recorded. The ears are oval and tipped with tufts of dark hair. The eyes are small and the eyesight poor, but the senses of smell and hearing are very acute. The huge body is covered with a thick hide of grey skin, although due to the rhino's predilection for wallowing in mud, their coloration can appear very variable. The tail is short and tipped with stiff hairs. In spite of their bulk the Black Rhino is very manoeuvrable and capable of a top speed of 50 kph.

**Distribution and Habits** - The distribution of this species has been much reduced in the past 25 years as a result of increased poaching. They favour areas of dry bushy savannah and lightly wooded regions. In most areas they survive by browsing leaves and shoots from bushes and trees, although the population inhabiting the Ngorongoro Crater grazes regularly due to the lack of suitable browse. They feed mainly in the early morning and late afternoon, seeking shade or a mud wallow during the hottest midday period. Although they are capable of surviving for several days without water, they will drink and wallow daily when possible, often travelling many miles to an available source. During periods of drought they will often dig for water in dried up river beds using their forelegs. Rhino's are solitary animals although females are usually accompanied by their most recent offspring.

## KEY FACTS

Size	Height: 1.6 m Weight: Up to 1400 kgs.
Breeding	Gestation: 16 months. Young: One only. Sexual Maturity: 6-7 years. Births: No specific season, but peaks after the rainy season.
Lifespan	Up to 40 years.
Lifestyle	Family: Solitary. Diet: Herbivorous. Main Predators: Man. Lions and Spotted Hyaenas will occasionally take an unguarded calf. Habitat: Dry, bushy savannah and light woodlands.

**Conservation & Status:** Numbers have been drastically reduced during the past 25 years as a result of poaching. Fuelled by an increase in the demand for horns by Arab nations for ceremonial dagger handles and by Far Eastern countries, as a medicine/aphrodisiac, the species is threatened with extinction.



# White Rhinoceros

Order: *Perissodactyla*      Family: *Rhinocerotidae*      Genus & Species: *Ceratotherium simum*

**Identification** - The White Rhino is the world's second largest land mammal - the Elephant being the largest. The animal's name has nothing whatever to do with colour, but is a corruption of the Afrikaans word "Weit" meaning 'wide' and refers to the shape of the mouth, this being the most obvious difference between the two African species. Far bigger and heavier than the Black Rhino the head is large, square-shaped and carries two horns. The front horn is the larger of the two, averaging 60 cms. in length, the rear horn is shorter and thicker. The ears are large and oval in shape, the eyes are small and the eyesight is rather poor. The huge body is covered with a thick hide of pale grey skin. The tail is short, terminating with stiff hairs.

**Distribution & Habits** - Several attempts to reintroduce this species into East Africa's National Parks have been undertaken in recent times, but most of the introduced animals have subsequently fallen to poachers guns and snares. Hopefully, the latest introduction of seventeen animals from South Africa into Kenya's Lake Nakuru National Park, will fare better, thereby securing the long-term future of the species in East Africa. They feed by grazing, using the wide mouth and strong lips to crop short grasses. They will feed throughout the day and night, but usually seek shelter from the hot midday sun. They will drink several times a day if water is readily available but during the dry season they can subsist by drinking every 3 to 4 days. In spite of their bulk they are suprisingly quick and manoeuvrable.

## KEY FACTS

Size:	Height: 1.85 m. Weight: 2100 kgs (average)
Breeding	Gestation: 16 months. Young: One only. Sexual Maturity: 6-7 years. Births: No specific season, but peak occurs after the rains.
Lifespan	Up to 40 years.
Lifestyle	Family: Solitary, although from time to time animals, usually of the same sex, may gather together. Diet: Herbivorous. Main Predator: Man. Habitat: Dry, bushy savannah & lightly wooded regions.

**Conservation & Status** - Like the Black Rhino the long-term survival of this species in the wild is in some doubt. The persistent and systematic poaching of this most gentle of animals, is bringing it to the verge of extinction.

