

The prepoceros rhinoceros

Joanna Skipwith's new book, "Rhino: Animals in art" tracks down some wonderful rhino gems of art, myth and literature, including Ogden Nash's charming rhyme:

Cathy Dean
Director

*The rhino is a homely beast,
For human eyes he's not a feast.
Farewell, farewell, you old rhinoceros,
I'll stare at something less prepoceros.*

Looking at our front cover illustration, it's not hard to work out why Nash thought these animals are prepoceros.

The Sumatran rhino - only 300 of them surviving in the world, rarely seen - really is a strange-looking beast. With its reddish-brown hairs, elongated head, stubby horns, it's not the iconic silhouette that any child would immediately recognise. No wonder so few people have heard of them, know what they look like or realise how critically endangered they are.

Yet even the much better-known African species, black and white rhinos, are in dire straits. I was at the African Rhino Specialist Group meeting in Swaziland in June, when it was confirmed that the western subspecies of the black rhino, which two or three years ago was grimly hanging on in small pockets of forest in Cameroon, has gone extinct. Not threatened, not endangered, but extinct. The northern white rhinos of Garamba National Park in the Congo are now down to the last four individuals. Even if they survive the attentions of the Lords Resistance Army, even if there are rhinos of both sexes of the right age to breed, with a gene pool of only four, the prospects are not good.

Not all the news is bad news. Overall, black and white rhino numbers are up, as shown below. I calculated at one point that if black rhino numbers increase by the target 5% each year, then by 2025, when I will be 59

years old, there will be 10,000 black rhinos. That would be a nice note on which to retire. But it's going to take a helluva lot of hard work - and probably quite a bit of luck too. What a prepoceros challenge.

Country	White rhinos				Trend
	<i>Ceratotherium simum cottoni</i>	<i>Ceratotherium simum simum</i>	Total		
Botswana		97	97		Up+intro
DRC	4		4		Down
Kenya		235	235		Up
Mozambique		?	?		?
Namibia		293	293		Up
S Africa		13,524	13,524		Up
Swaziland		75	75		Up
Zambia		2	2		Down
Zimbabwe		308	308		Up
Uganda		4	4		New
Total	4	14,538	14,542		Up

Country	Black rhinos						Trend
	<i>Diceros bicornis bicornis</i>	<i>Diceros bicornis longipes</i>	<i>Diceros bicornis michaeli</i>	<i>Diceros bicornis minor</i>	<i>Diceros bicornis brucei?</i>	Total	
Botswana				5		5	Stable
Cameroon	0?					0?	Extinct?
Ethiopia					0?	0?	Extinct?
Kenya			539			539	Up
Malawi				10		10	Up
Namibia	1,141					1,141	Down
Rwanda			1			1	Stable
S Africa	80		41	1,258		1,379	Up
Swaziland				16		16	Up
Tanzania			57	44		101	Up
Zambia				6		6	Intro
Zimbabwe				527		527	Down
Total	1,221	0	637	1,866	0?	3,724	Up



ING New York City Marathon	Sunday 5 November 2006
Mkomazi Matatu	Thursday 8 February 2007
Rhino Climb Kilimanjaro	March 2007
Rhino Trek India	Saturday 10 - Saturday 24 2007
Fifth Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture	Thursday 15 March 2007
Flora London Marathon	Sunday 22 April 2007
Rhino MayDay	May 2007 (tbc)
Rhino Cycle Namibia	Sunday 20 - Wednesday 30 May 2007

Events Schedule:

For more information about any of these, please email events@savetherhino.org, or alternatively call +44 (0)20 7357 7474.

NB:
• Table excludes speculative guestimates
• Numbers, as at 31 December 2005, primarily compiled at the IUCN SSC ARSG meeting held in Swaziland 2006
• Trends are as compared to the 2004 figures.