

BIRTH OF A WHITE RHINOCEROS IN CAPTIVITY

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The San Antonio Zoo, San Antonio, Texas, recorded the birth of a male white (square lipped) Rhinoceros (Diceros simum cottoni) on August 28, 1972. This was the first recorded birth from a female, bred while in captivity outside of Africa. The parents had been in the zoo collection since October 5, 1970.

An exact gestation period could not be calculated since several matings were observed 15 and 16 months previous. One published gestation period was 548 days (4). Another report estimated 16 months as the gestation period, as birth occurred 15 months and 3 weeks after capture(5). Sixteen months appears to be the approximate gestation period for the White Rhinoceros. Other Perissodactylae are known to cycle and accept males following fertilization. This may be the reason for our observed matings 15 months prepartum. The placenta was shed (and eaten) about 2 hours postpartum.

The calf weighed an estimated 70-80 pounds at birth. He defecated and urinated within 2 hours after delivery. Zoo personnel manually guided his early nursing efforts.

An analysis of the mother's milk provided the following data:

Protein	7.34%
Fat	1.73%
Total Solids	14.23%

This varies significantly from that published for both the Black Rhinoceros (Diceros bicornis) (1,2) and White Rhinoceros(6). However, the protein in colostral milk of a Black Rhinoceros declined from 6.4% to 1.65% in post-colostral milk(3) and ranged from 1.18 to 1.54% in the post-colostral of the White Rhino(6). Both are remarkably low in fat when compared to other milks.

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References

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