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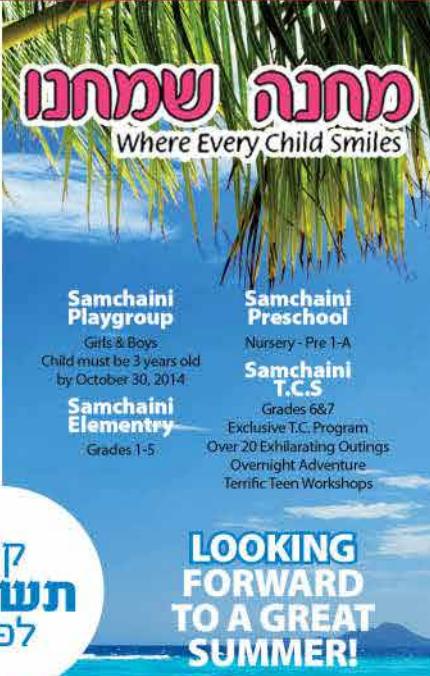
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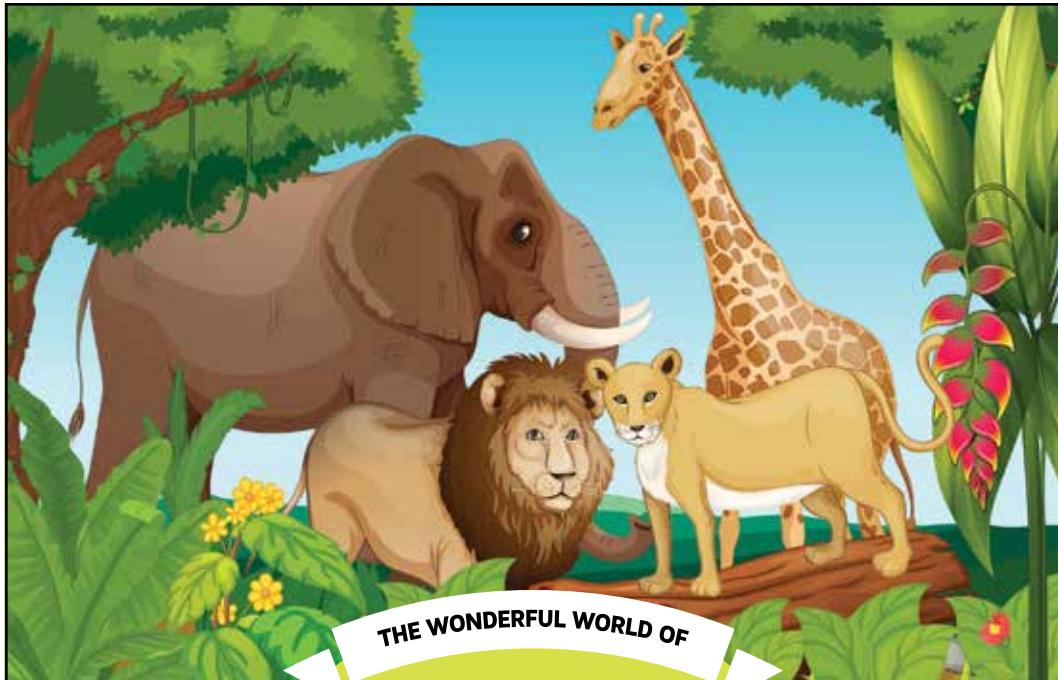
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By **Etty Berkowitz**



Rhinoceroses

The rhinoceros, sometimes colloquially called a rhino, is quite an imposing animal. Weighing in at anywhere between 1,750-8,000 pounds, depending on species, it is one of the largest land mammals. Although they look like lumbering beasts, they can actually run between 30-40 mph. They are one of the famous "Big Five" game animals of Africa, a group of the five

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ANIMALS**- 2 -**

animals hardest to hunt on foot.

The word rhinoceros comes from the Latin word "rhino", which means nose, and "keras", which means horn, so rhinoceros means "horn-nosed." In English, it is correct to pluralize the word rhinoceros in one of three ways: either the same as the singular, or rhinoceroses, or infrequently, rhinoceri. A group of rhinoceroses are called a crash or herd.

TYPES OF RHINOCEROS

There are five basic types of rhinoceroses alive today: white, black, Sumatran, Indian and Javan.

The white rhinoceros, also called the square-lipped rhinoceros, isn't really white; it is a grayish color. Legend has it that the name "white rhino" originated in South Africa, where the language is Afrikaans. The Afrikaans word "wyd" means "wide," referring to the rhino's wide mouth. Early English settlers in South African misinterpreted the word, and so this rhino is called the white one, and the one with the pointed mouth ended up being called black. Along with the Indian rhinoceros which is similar in size, the white rhinoceros is the second-largest land animal in the world today, after the elephant. It is the most social of all the rhino species, and is the

most common rhino around, as the others are endangered. With their wide mouths, they graze on wide swathes of grass at a time. White rhinos weigh over 7,000 pounds and have a head-body length of 11-15 feet. They have two horns on their snouts; the front one is longer and averages 35 inches long, but can be as long as 59 inches!



Wide lips distinguish the white rhino, not skin color, which is similar to the black rhino.



The black rhinoceros has a beak-shaped lip and is similar in color to the white rhinoceros.

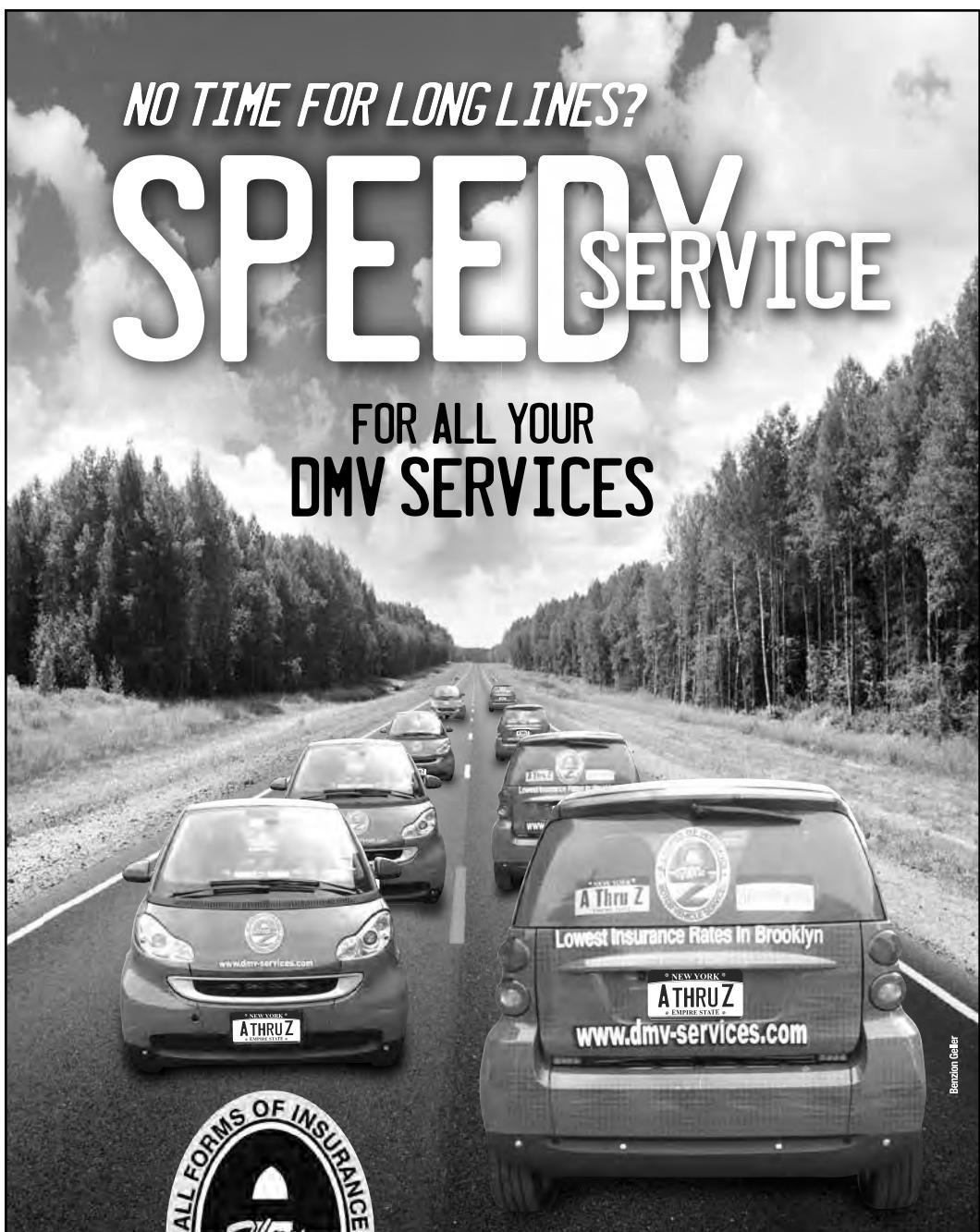


The smallest of all living species of rhinoceroses is the Sumatran rhino. It is also the hairiest. Its fur helps it survive the weather where they reside, and also allows a very thick coat of mud to stick to the rhino and prevent insect bites and injuries from thorns. They live in the high altitudes of Borneo and Sumatra and only about 275 are believed to remain. A typical Sumatran

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ANIMALS**- 3 -**

rhino weighs about 1,500 pounds, and has two horns, like the African species.

The Indian rhinoceros is also known as the greater one-horned rhinoceros and lives in India and Nepal. It has a single horn that can be up to forty inches long. Although it is similar in size to the African white rhino, its skin is thick and silvery-brown, and folds all over its body. Grown males weigh up to 7,000 pounds, and are larger than the females, who weigh about 4,000 pounds. These rhinos used to be found in Pakistan, Burma, and parts of China, but due to human influence, their habitat has shrunk significantly.

The Javan rhinoceros is one of the most endangered large mammals in the world, and less than 100 remain. Their skin is hairless and gray, and falls in folds over its body, giving it the appearance of armor. The males have only one horn, and females have just knobs, or nothing at all. Javan rhinos used to be prevalent throughout Asia, but they were nearly hunted to extinction in many areas, due to belief in the supposed medicinal powers of their horns and blood. As a result, only about forty live in Java, Indonesia.



The Indian rhinoceros has a single horn



Tapir, close relative of the rhino



Rhino with her baby. Notice the oxpeckers on the mother's back.

Biologists estimate that rhinos live about 35-50 years in the wild. They may live until age forty in captivity. Rhinoceroses are herbivores, meaning they eat only plants. Some graze on grass, while others prefer the foliage of trees and bushes.

The closest living relatives to rhinos are tapirs, horses, and zebras.

Though they have acute hearing and an excellent sense of smell, rhinos have poor eyesight over any distance. They are more active in the evening, night and early morning, and then spend the hot daytime resting in the shade. They can sleep in both standing and lying positions, and enjoy wallowing in muddy pools and sandy riverbeds to cool off. Though their skin is more than a half-inch thick, they get sunburned easily and are often bitten by insects, and therefore like to protect their skin with mud.

Rhino horns are unlike other animal horns or tusks that have a bony core. Instead, the rhino horn consists only of keratin, the substance our hair and nails are made of. The

horn is basically a hard, solid mass of thickly matted hair growing out of the snout, not supported in any way to the skeletal system. Rhinos use their horns in battles with other rhinos over territory. They may also use it to defend themselves from li-

ABOUT RHINOCEROSES

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ANIMALS**- 4 -**

ons, hyenas, and tigers. Rhino calves are born without horns.

Small birds called oxpeckers have a symbiotic relationship with the rhinos. They remove ticks from the rhino's skin, and also make a lot of noise when they perceive a threat, alerting the rhino to danger. The Swahili name for these birds is "askari wa kifaru" (rhino guard).

RHINOCEROSES AND HUMANS

Other than humans, adult rhinoceroses don't have real predators in the wild. However young rhinos can fall prey to crocodiles, wild dogs, hyenas and big cats. Poachers go after rhinos for their horns, which are in great demand, especially as dagger handles in Yemen, and for practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, who use powdered rhino horns in their remedies for fevers and convulsions.

To prevent the extinction of rhinos, in some places they have been tranquilized and had their horns removed, eliminating most of the incentive to kill them. Another horn-trade control project, which takes place in the Krugersdorp Nature Reserve in South Africa, is dying the horns. This is

done by infusing the horns with a mixture of pink dye and acaricide, which kills ticks. This concoction is safe for rhinos, but toxic to humans. The animal is sedated, and then holes are drilled into the horns and the dye is sprayed in. It doesn't take too long, but the animal must be rolled every few minutes while under sedation, or there will be too much pressure on their internal organs due to their massive weight. The dye doesn't affect the horn's color or rhino behavior. However, humans who consume acaricide can expect nausea, stomach aches and diarrhea, although it wouldn't be fatal. This acts as a major deterrent for those who poach animals to use their horns in medicine, and large signs are posted near the park to inform would-be hunters that the animal horns have been dyed. It is claimed that the dye cannot be removed and shows up on x-rays, even when the horn is finely ground into powder. Originally a way to rid rhinos of ticks, this has evolved into an effective way to dissuade poaching. Despite all these efforts, nevertheless poaching remains a real concern that threatens the existence of this amazing species.



Comments? Questions? Would you like to see a specific animal featured in this column? Write to etty@weeklylink.com

