

FACTS AT YOUR  
FINGERTIPS

THE WORLD OF  
ENDANGERED ANIMALS

# **SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA**



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In this book you will see the following key at top left of each entry. The key shows the level of threat faced by each animal, as judged by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

<b>EX</b>	Extinct
<b>EW</b>	Extinct in the Wild
<b>CR</b>	Critically Endangered
<b>EN</b>	Endangered
<b>VU</b>	Vulnerable
<b>NT</b>	Near Threatened
<b>LC</b>	Least Concern
<b>O</b>	Other (this includes Data Deficient [DD] and Not Evaluated [NE])

For a few animals that have not been evaluated since 2001, the old status of Lower Risk still applies and this is shown by the letters **LR** on the key.

For more information on Categories of Threat, see pp. 54-57.

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# Great Indian Rhinoceros

## *Rhinoceros unicornis*

Despite its armor-plated appearance, the single-horned great Indian rhinoceros is vulnerable and has suffered badly from hunting as well as from habitat loss; it is now restricted to a handful of game reserves.

The Indian rhinoceros likes wet places where it can wallow in mud during hot weather, and where sufficient food is available to support its huge bulk. It feeds and shelters in the long scrub and grass habitats found on the wide plains that fringe the rivers of northern India. However, such fertile areas also make prime farmland, and over the last 300 years the rhino's habitat has been increasingly cultivated to grow crops. The expansion of human activity quickly proved incompatible with the continued presence of the animals, which not only ate vast amounts but could

also be very aggressive, especially females with young calves to protect. As a result, the rhinos were forced out of their ancestral breeding grounds. For a while, there was even a government bounty paid for each rhino killed, as a measure to reduce the damage they caused in new tea plantations.

There were other motives for killing the rhinos. In India, as elsewhere, animals were slaughtered and their horns sold to the oriental medicine trade. In addition, many were killed by both Indian and European hunters for trophies; one maharajah (Hindu prince) is said to have shot over 200 animals in 30 years.

By the beginning of the 20th century the rhinos had gone from Pakistan and northwestern India and were becoming scarce in other parts of their range. About a dozen were left in what is now the Kaziranga National Park, and a few isolated individuals survived in other parts of India. There were only about 50 left in Nepal, where the species faced imminent extinction. Since that time, however, strict protection and the careful management of sanctuaries have slowly allowed the rhinos to recover. Yet there is still too little habitat for their numbers to build

### DATA PANEL

#### Great Indian rhinoceros

*Rhinoceros unicornis*

**Family:** Rhinocerotidae

**World population:** 2,575 (2007 estimate), including 2,200 in India; increasing

**Distribution:** Bhutan, Nepal, and parts of northern India (Assam). Now extinct in Bangladesh

**Habitat:** Marshy areas of long grass; various types of forest

**Size:** Length head/body: 12–12.5 ft (3.6–3.8 m); tail: 28–32 in (70–80 cm); height at shoulder: 5.6–6 ft (1.7–1.8 m); Weight: 3,300–4,400 lb (1,500–2,000 kg); males can weigh up to 4,840 lb (2,200 kg)

**Form:** A huge animal whose knobby-looking skin hangs in large, stiff sections like sheets of armor plate. There is only 1 horn, up to 20 in (52 cm) long

**Diet:** Grasses, leaves, and aquatic plants; sometimes raids crops

**Breeding:** A single calf is born after a gestation of nearly 16 months. Weaning takes more than 1 year, and young are born only once every 3 years. Females can breed at 4 years, but males take 9 years to reach maturity. Life span about 40 years

**Related endangered species:** Black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) CR; white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) NT; Javan rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) CR; Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) CR

**Status:**  
IUCN VU







up to any great extent, and illegal hunting is also difficult to stamp out. Rhino horns still fetch large sums of money, a huge temptation for poor villagers who cannot easily make a living from farming. In addition, the skin and blood of the rhinos are said to have medicinal properties, further increasing the poachers' financial rewards.

### Action against Poaching

In the early 1990s large amounts of money from local sources and international conservation organizations enabled India and Nepal to implement action against poachers. Fines were introduced for traders in rhino body parts, and there were heavy jail sentences for hunters; several poachers were even shot. About 500 rhinos now live in Nepal, many of them guarded by armed soldiers in Chitwan National Park.

**Great Indian rhinos** are powerful animals with massive folds of skin that hang like sheets of armor plating. Their marshy grassland habitat provides them with the food, water, and shelter they need. The fertile soil is also ideal for farming, and the rhinos are being forced out. Major floods recently drowned many rhinos in areas near big rivers.

The Indian government protects its rhinos, too. Kaziranga National Park contains more than 1,000 animals, though it is feared that such a heavy concentration could lead to disease spreading more rapidly. To reduce the risk of an epidemic sweeping through the population, it is important that the rhinos are more widely dispersed. One aim is to reintroduce small populations to more distant areas. A pair of rhinos has been introduced to Lal Suhanra National Park in Pakistan, but the animals have not bred.