



At first, there was some cause for alarm as Scooter's new baby decided to enter the world back feet first, rather than the more traditional headfirst birth.

Finally, a Rhino Birth at the San Diego Zoo

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Considering that the San Diego Zoo is famous for its breeding success, especially with endangered species, it might be difficult to believe that in 76 years there has never been a rhinoceros born at the Zoo. The opening of the Wild Animal Park 20 years ago probably had something to do with this. Since its opening in 1972, 100 rhinos have been born there, and the focus of breeding rhinos shifted from the Zoo to the Park. As the record shows, it was a good decision. However, in 1983 the Zoo acquired a male black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* and received a female to be his mate in 1988, on a breeding loan from the Sedgwick County Zoo in Kansas. The Zoo hoped that these two would become the foundation for a rhino breeding program (as part of the AAZPA Species Survival Program). Black rhinos are the smaller of the two African species and therefore do not require as much space as their larger cousins, the southern white rhinos, which have done well at the Park.

The male black rhino, Dillon, was a proven breeder, but the female, Scooter, had never been a mother before. For the first three years that the two animals were together, a lot of breeding activity was witnessed by keepers. This meant that the two were compatible, which is a must when trying to start a breeding program. In April of 1992, we noticed that Scooter was looking a little chubby; with the help of researchers from CRES, we were able to confirm that she was pregnant. We were not positive of the date of conception, but we estimated that she would give birth anywhere between June and November. A black rhino's gestation period is approximately 15 to 17 months. By the end of October, we had moved Scooter to a back holding pen to give her plenty of time to adjust to her maternity ward.

Of the seven rhinos currently housed at the Zoo, Scooter had always been the most nervous. The other rhinos would seek out the keepers to have their backs scratched, but we would be lucky if Scooter allowed us to touch her nose. In her new pen, not only did she adjust but she also became more tractable. We have a chute that connects all the rhino pens from the back, and we trained her to stand in it to al-



Scooter turned out to be a great mother even though she had no experience. She licked the newborn calf clean and was very protective if keepers ventured too close.



Finally, 2½ hours after birth, the Zoo's new black rhino stood for the first time. He had experienced several failed attempts as his back feet kept slipping out from under him.

low us to examine her. It was while she was in the chute that we noticed her milk bag was getting full—a sure sign she was only a few days away from giving birth. On November 13, we asked the Zoo security guards who were working the night shift to check her every two hours.

At 6:45 P.M. on November 15, a security guard noticed that Scooter was expelling a lot of fluid. He immediately called keepers and hospital staff, and at 8:30 P.M. we arrived just in time to see Scooter pass more amniotic fluids. We knew then that this was just what we had been waiting for. As Scooter paced nervously in and out of her barn, we started to become a little anxious. This was going to be Scooter's first baby, and we weren't sure how she was going to react to it. It wasn't long before we could see the baby coming, but it was coming out back feet first instead of head first. That was cause for some alarm, but now all we could do was wait.

At 9:50 P.M., we were relieved to see that the baby was almost out. Suddenly, Scooter ran out of her warm barn and decided to have her offspring outside. This was something we had not counted on. Because the night was cool and the baby was wet, we had to think quickly. With the help of security guards, buildings and grounds workers, and construction and maintenance employees, we gathered as many propane heaters as we could find on the grounds. Within 30 minutes, we had 5 heaters all around the pen and we could feel the temperature going up.

Our next concern was whether or not Scooter knew how to be a good mother. Sometimes new mothers are not sure what to make of this small creature that has appeared out of nowhere. With some animals, there is a possibility that a first-time mother will intentionally injure the baby because she is frightened of it. We were relieved to see that not only was Scooter unafraid of her baby, she also began to protect it by charging any of us who peeked over the wall too far. We were even a little surprised to see her licking the baby clean without any hesitation. So far, Scooter was behaving like an experienced mother.

The only thing left for us to worry about was whether the baby could stand and if Scooter would allow it to nurse. We had to wait about 2½ hours to find out that it could indeed stand, after many failed attempts. It had no trouble with its front feet, but its back feet kept slipping out from under it. Even though its feet seemed as large as dinner plates, it still had to muster up enough strength to stand on all four legs. Mom was standing close by, appearing to be urging it to keep trying. By the time the little rhino finally did get up, Scooter was showing signs of exhaustion and had gone into the barn to rest. We hoped the baby would go in with her, but it just stood in a corner while it learned to steady itself. It was at this time that we could definitely tell it was a male.

It wasn't until four hours after he was born that all our concerns were put to rest. By 3 A.M., he had joined Scooter in the barn and began searching for her teats. At first, he began to look between her front legs, and when he found nothing there, he started to work his way back. The whole time, Scooter held still, patiently allowing the baby to nuzzle her while he looked for his first meal. When he did find her teats, he nursed for at least 20 minutes. Finally, we could all relax. Scooter had shown us she was going to be a good mother despite her lack of experience.

The next day, we decided to call the rhino Werikhe, after the Kenyan Rhino Man, Michael Werikhe, who has spent many years teaching the world about the plight of the black rhino. Rikhe, as we call him—it's pronounced Ricky—weighed in at 68 pounds and is fast becoming a feisty character. Now that we have finally broken the ice on breeding rhinos at the Zoo, we are all hoping that our most recently acquired pair of black rhinos, Mimi and Little, have successfully bred. These two have been at the Zoo only three years, but there's a good chance that the female is pregnant. Also, let us not forget that the Zoo currently has the only breeding pair of Sumatran rhinos *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* in the country. We hope to be telling you the story of their first baby soon. Keep your fingers crossed for us! **ZNZ**