

Black Rhino: *Diceros bicornis*. Population: 4,240

Critically endangered black rhinos are slowly recovering from a 96% decline in population. In 1970, there were about 65,000 black rhinos in Africa. The rampant slaughter of black rhinos for their horns decimated the population to just 2,300 in 1993.

Asian superstitions about rhino horn as a “medicine” continue to drive this species closer to the brink of extinction. Illegal rhino killings have increased to an unsustainable level - a direct result of China’s affluency boom and growing economic footprint in Africa.

Four Subspecies of Black Rhino

- Eastern black rhino (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*)
- Southwestern black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) - subspecies adapted to arid desert conditions.
- Southern central black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*)
- Western black rhino (*Diceros bicornis longipes*) - reportedly extinct as of 2006, due to poaching.

Black Rhino Distribution

Today, black rhinos are found in Namibia, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Small populations of fewer than 20 black rhinos are in Malawi, Swaziland, and Zambia.

Distinguishing Characteristics

The black rhino’s two horns are comprised of keratin - the same material as fingernails and hair. The front horn is generally from 1’ 8” - 4’4” long. The rear horn is smaller, measuring from 1” - 22” long.

The black rhino is not actually black in color, but may derive its name as a distinction from the white rhino. Skin color of the black rhino varies depending upon local soil and wallowing.

The easiest way to identify the black rhino at a glance is to check out the snout. The black rhino has a relatively narrow snout with a prehensile lip, and is also known as the hook-lipped rhino. The prehensile lip enables the black rhino to feed from trees and shrubs. The black rhino is hairless, except for eyelashes, ear tufts, and hair on the tip of the tail.

Like all rhinos, black rhinos are odd-toed ungulates, and have three toes on each foot. Also in common with other rhinos is a superb sense of hearing and keen sense of smell - but relatively poor eyesight.

Size of the Black Rhino

The black rhino is smaller than the white rhino. The black rhino weighs from 1,750 - 3,000 pounds, and stands from 4.5 - 5.5 feet at the shoulder. End-to-end, the black rhino can be 10 - 12.5 feet in length.



Activity

Despite their large size, black rhinos can run up to 35 mph and quickly change direction. Adult black rhinos tend to be solitary, except for females with calves of varying ages, up to four years.

Black rhinos prefer to feed early in the morning and drink water at night, spending the hotter part of the day sleeping in the shade or wallowing in mud to protect their sensitive skin.

Life Span

- Black rhinos can live 45 years or more in captivity, and generally 30 - 35 years in the wild.

Scientific Name and Origin

Diceros bicornis

- *Diceros*: from the Greek di, meaning “two” and ceros, meaning “horn”
- *bicornis*: from the Latin bi, meaning “two” and cornis, meaning “horn”

Sources: WWF, International Rhino Foundation, Save the Rhino International & Rhino Resource Center

