



# Black Rhinoceros

*Diceros bicornis*

## Classification *What groups does this organism belong to based on characteristics shared with other organisms?*

Class: Mammalia (all mammals)  
Order: Perissodactyla (horses, rhinos, tapirs)  
Family: Rhinocerotidae (all rhinoceros)  
Genus: *Diceros* (black rhinoceros)  
Species: *bicornis* (black rhinoceros)



## Distribution *Where in the world does this species live?*

Scattered pockets of Africa from the Cape to Somalia, typically found in protected areas or reserves

## Habitat *What kinds of areas does this species live in?*

Scrublands, tropical and subtropical grasslands, montane forests, savannas

## Physical Description *How would this animal's body shape and size be described?*

- Black rhinos are 10.8-12.0 feet (3.3-3.6 m) long.
- They weigh 1,760-3,080 pounds (800-1,400 kg). Males are slightly larger than females.
- They stand 60-63 inches (152-161 cm) at the shoulder.
- The skin of the black rhino is dark gray or dark brown, not black.
- They have two horns on the nose. The larger anterior horn can average 1.5 feet (0.5 m) long.
- They have a large head, short neck and short, thick legs.
- They have a prehensile, pointed upper lip.

## Diet *What does this species eat?*

*In their historic range:* Black rhinos are browsers which means they feed on twigs, branches, leaves and shrubs. They also eat grasses and bark

*At the zoo:* A specially formulated herbivores pellet diet, hay, browse, and produce such as lettuce, apples, and banana for enrichment and training.

## Predators *What eats this species?*

Calves can fall prey to lions and hyenas. Although it is illegal, humans continue to hunt rhinos, primarily for their horn, which can be sold for a high price on the black market.



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## Social Organization *How does this animal interact with others of its species?*

Black rhinos have been identified as solitary animals for many years, with the exception of mating pairs and females with calves. Males are primarily solitary and territorial, but recent studies have found that females and sub adults can be fairly social and share ranges.

## Life Cycle *How does this species mate, raise young, grow and develop?*

Females are mature at about five to six years; males at seven to eight years. After a gestation of 15-16 months, females give birth to a single calf weighing 75-110 pounds (35-50 kg), which the mother raises on her own. Calves are weaned at about two and a half years but may remain with the mother up for two to three years until the next calf is born. Females may stay with the mother longer than three years. Lifespan in the wild is 35-50 years, and in managed care settings extends to 45 years.

## Adaptations *What physical and behavioral characteristics enable this animal to survive and thrive?*

- They have a **prehensile lip** which they use to grasp and strip leaves and bark from woody plants.
- Rhinos have **thick but sensitive skin**. They can get insect bites and even sunburn, so rhinos need access to shade and mud. Mud helps keep biting insects away and protects skin like sunscreen.
- Rhinos **walk on their toes!** They have three toes with a **soft pad** under the toes that help cushion their enormous weight.
- Rhino **horns** are primarily used for protection. They can break off or wear down, but will grow back over time since they are a mass of keratin (the same material as hair) perched on a roughened area of the skull.
- A rhino's best senses are **hearing** and **smell**. They do not have very good eyesight. When the time comes for breeding, rhinos find each other by following the scent of their intended mate for miles.

## Collection Connection

Rudy, full name Rudisha, is Denver Zoo's resident black rhino, who is located just to the right of the main entrance near the Gates Center. He was born 8/16/1993. Rudy is a very food motivated rhino, who loves browse and apples.

Fresh plant material is an essential component in black rhino diets both for their teeth and digestive health. Because of Denver's limited growing season, Rudy gets browse flown in from Florida every week. Currently he receives 4 boxes weighing 15 kg each, 4 times per week.

## Conservation Status *Is this animal at risk for extinction and why?*

*IUCN Status: Critically Endangered*

Intensive anti-poaching efforts have allowed the black rhino population to recover from an estimated 2,000 individuals in 1993, to about 5,000. But the threat from poaching still remains great, and rhinos are slow to reproduce – having only have one calf at a time. They are also threatened by habitat loss.

## Resources and Where to Learn More

International Rhino Foundation <https://rhinos.org/species/black-rhino/>.

Association of Zoos and Aquariums <https://www.aza.org/SAFE-black-rhino>.