

# INDIAN RHINOS

## "GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINOS"

Indian rhinos are the largest of the three Asian rhino species and are more or less equal in size to the white rhino. Males can be fiercely territorial often using their teeth rather than their horns for defense. Sparring can last for several hours, and it is not uncommon for those involved to die, usually a few days later because of sustained injuries.

The Indian rhino is the most aquatic of all Asian rhinos, and is known for being an excellent swimmer, as well as being capable of diving and eating under water.

Historically, habitat loss and wide-scale hunting decimated the population. By 2005, numbers had dropped to as low as 2000-2500 individuals. In less than two decades, due to strict protection laws, protected habitats, and conservation initiatives, the population has almost doubled.



### SCIENTIFIC NAME

Rhinoceros unicornis

"uni" meaning one and "cornis" meaning horn in Latin

### SUB-SPECIES

No subspecies

### CONSERVATION STATUS

Vulnerable (IUCN Redlist classification)

### POPULATION

4014 individuals (correct as of early 2022)

### CURRENT RANGE

Current range: Found only in India, Bhutan and Nepal. Approximately 80% of the population are found in 7 national parks and sanctuaries in India with around 752 individuals residing in Chitwan, Bardia and Shuklaphanta National Parks, Nepal. In addition to crossing the Himalayan foothills, rhinos are also known to cross into Bhutan from Manas National Park

### HISTORICAL RANGE

Once prolific across the North Indian River Plain a 700-thousand km<sup>2</sup> region encompassing the Indian subcontinent, including most of northern and eastern India, around half of Pakistan, Bangladesh and the southern plains of Nepal, as well as the Brahmaputra River basins, from Pakistan to the Indian-Myanmar border and possibly into southern China



### POPULATION INCREASE/DECREASE

Typically hunted for sport and for their horns which are carved into curiosities such as drinking vessels, ornaments, weapons and used in traditional Asian medicine (TCM), the Indian rhino was almost hunted to extinction. By the early 1900s, numbers totalled less than 50 individuals. As a result of robust conservation programs, habitat protection, and increased security, over 4000 rhinos have been recorded today.

The Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020), established in 2005 for the purpose of increasing the population in Assam to 3000 individuals which were surpassed. Further, the Indian government has increased Orang National Park by 200 square kilometers to provide a wider landscape corridor for rhinos and other threatened species between Laokhowa and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries for rhinos and other threatened species

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on January 2, 2022, that no rhinos had been poached in the India in 2022, the first year without poaching in several decades





### AVERAGE LIFESPAN

35-40 years. During 2017, one of the oldest captive Indian rhinos died at the age of 48

### HEIGHT

Females: 1.5-1.7 m  
Males: 1.6-1.9 m  
(Height to shoulder)

### WEIGHT

Calf birth weight: 35-70 kg  
Females: 1,600 kg  
Males: 2,200 kg

### AVERAGE SPEED

Up to 34 mph

### DIET

Fruits, leaves, long grasses, aquatic plants and sometimes farm crops

### SOCIAL

Males are largely solitary and fiercely territorial. Females also tend to be solitary when they are without calves

### HORNS

One single horn averaging 25 cm and weighing around 3kg

### HEARING

They have well developed hearing

### VISION

Their vision is poor

### COMMUNICATION

They have at least 10 vocalisations including; shrieking, groaning, snoring, squeak-panting, rumbling, bleating, honking, moo-grunting, humping, snorting and ritualised defecation in the form of middens which are communal dung heaps used like a social network



### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

A grey bulbous body with heavy armour like skin folds and plates, especially at the base of the neck. These folds serve to protect against predator attacks and injury from foliage and contain a layer of subcutaneous fat which helps insulate the body from both heat and cold. Patches of tubercles (small, warty outgrowths) can also be seen across the skin folds.

### REPRODUCTION

- First birth: 6-8 years
- Gestation: 15-16 months
- Birth numbers: Single calf
- Calf weight: Approximately 35-70 kg
- Weaned: 12-18 months
- Birth interval: 3-4 years
- Female sexual maturity: 5 years
- Male sexual maturity: 9 years
- Despite not having natural predators, tigers frequently kill calves under a year old



### THREATS TO INDIAN RHINOS

The three greatest threats to Indian rhinos are the illegal wildlife trade, habitat degradation and climate change. For centuries, rhino horn has been a staple commodity in many Asian countries. Horns are used for medicinal, status symbol and practical purposes and traded as investment pieces. Speculative buyers acquire newly sourced horns (from poached rhinos) as long-term investments, banking on rarity and/or extinction to increase financial return. This market, powered by fictitious claims and false beliefs is pushing rhinos closer to extinction.

Degradation of habitat is particularly harmful to Indian rhinos. By reduction in habitat, rhino populations may become fragmented and dispersed, resulting in small, isolated populations that may become prone to disease and inbreeding, as well as conflict with humans and increased competition for territory and food between rhinos and other species.

Climate change also affects habitats. Sustained periods of drought prolong the return of essential rivers, watering holes and vegetation which can lead to starvation. Increased rainfall causes flooding and loss of life as well as spoiling crops. Unprecedented flooding in Assam, India caused the death of 9 Indian rhinos and countless other species as well as human life in July 2020.

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