

# SOUTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS



*Ceratotherium simum simum*

## STATUS

- This has changed for the better and worse in recent years. In 1994 the IUCN listed Southern white Rhinoceros as Vulnerable. As numbers improved in conservation areas, it was changed to Lower Risk in 1996. However, rampant illegal poaching in several parts of its range has continued, leading to a change in status in 2003 to Near Threatened.
- Conservation efforts have brought the numbers from as few as 100, a century ago, to almost 18,000 today. They live in about 250 protected Southern white rhinoceros populations around the world.
- The Northern White Rhinoceros has been poached severely and only 4 adults survived in 2006, down from 2,300 in the 1960s. Its extinction is now inevitable.

## ORIGIN

- Southern white rhinoceros were once widespread across southern Africa. They were almost wiped out by poachers in the 19th century, with less than 100 individuals surviving.

## HABITAT

- Ideal Southern white rhinoceros habitat is long and short grass savannahs which include trees and water.
- They are able to go two to four days without water, but will drink twice daily if there is water nearby.

## SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- The bulls tend to be solitary whereas the females and sub-adults are more sociable, living in small groups.
- Bulls establish territories, which they defend. Groups of female and young move between male territories.
- Females are sexually mature at 6-7 years of age while the male matures later at 10-12 years.



## DESCRIPTION

- Following elephants, the Southern white rhinoceros is the next largest land mammal. The Southern white variety is much larger than the Black Rhinoceros and can weigh over 2 tonne.
- Southern white rhinoceros graze on the grasses that are common in their habitat. Its mouth shape is adapted for grazing.
- The two horns are not made of bone, but are actually made of keratin, the protein structures that make up hair and fingernails. They are a bit like compressed hair.
- The Southern white rhinoceros has a pronounced shoulder hump, a wide square mouth and is almost hairless except for fringed ears and tail bristles. Sparse, short hairs do cover most other skin.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

- Southern white rhinoceros are NOT white. The common name of 'White rhino' comes from the Afrikaans or Dutch word used to describe its mouth - 'weit', meaning wide. The Southern White Rhinoceros is sometimes called the Square-lipped rhinoceros.
- In comparison the Black Rhino has a much smaller mouth.
- The Southern White Rhinoceros has a gestation period of 16 months and will usually have one calf every 2 or 3 years.
- Life span is anywhere between 40 and 60 years.