

REALM OF THE

RHINO

Guardians of the Plains



Dear Friends,

I will never forget standing beside Sudan, the last male northern white rhino on Earth. Even in his final years, he carried a quiet strength that left everyone in awe. He represented both the majesty of nature and the devastating consequences of indifference.

When Sudan passed away on March 19, 2018, many of us mourned. A species millions of years in the making had disappeared in an instant. We were left asking the same questions: How did this happen in our lifetime, and what can we do to make sure it never happens again?

At the Topeka Zoo, we believe the answer begins with connection, education, and inspiration that transforms into action.

That is why we are proud to introduce Realm of the Rhino: Guardians of the Plains, an immersive new experience designed to inspire guests to become protectors of wildlife and champions for their future.

When people come face-to-face with these incredible giants, something powerful happens. Awareness turns into empathy, and empathy turns into action.

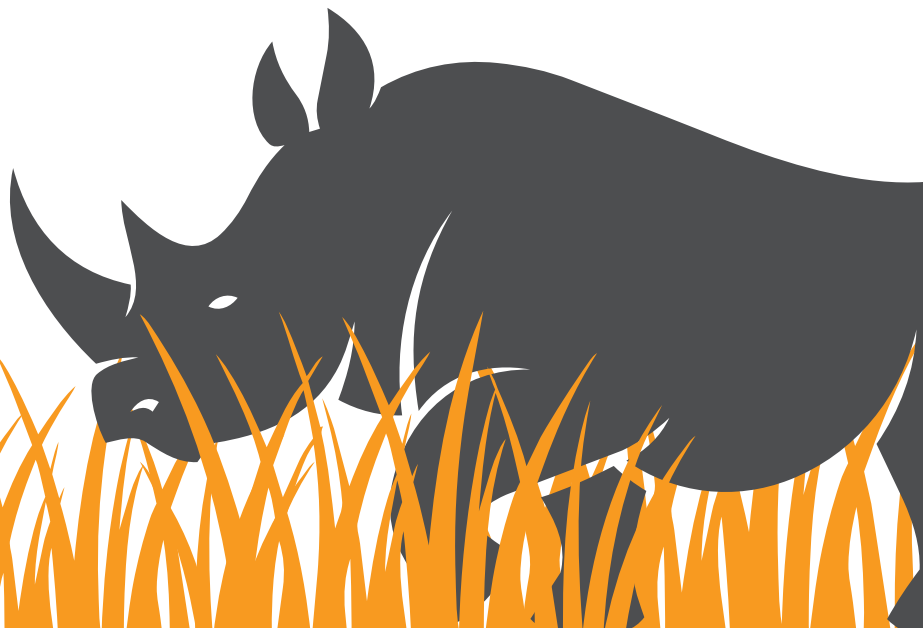
Your support helps us protect rhinos, educate generations, and ensure these magnificent creatures never disappear from our world again.

Sudan's story does not have to end with extinction. Together, we can turn it into a legacy of hope for all.

With gratitude,



Christina Castellano, PhD, MBA
Chief Executive Officer
Topeka Zoo & Conservation Center



REALM OF THE RHINO:

Guardians of the Plains

At a moment when the natural world is losing some of its most iconic species, you can help secure a future for one of the most extraordinary: the black rhinoceros.

Black rhinos are among the last survivors of a once-widespread lineage, now existing in fragmented landscapes where every individual matters and every loss is real. At Topeka Zoo, *Realm of the Rhino: Guardians of the Plains* will be an immersive conservation experience that brings guests directly into the reality of what it takes to keep a species from vanishing. Guests will follow a continuous story of survival, seeing rhinos living in a naturalistic habitat that supports their wellbeing and breeding, while also understanding the fragile balance that must be maintained to protect them.

That story expands beyond the animals themselves into the full network of protection that surrounds them: rangers who risk their lives tracking and defending rhinos in the wild, AI systems that detect movement and threats across vast landscapes, reproductive science working to preserve genetic diversity, and rhino dogs helping intercept poaching before it reaches its target. Alongside this, hands-on technology experiences will allow children to engage with simplified conservation tools, turning learning into active participation.

Together, these moments build an emotional arc that moves from wonder to urgency to hope, inviting guests to not just observe conservation, but to feel its weight in the quiet breath of a living rhino, the absence left by those already lost, and the fragile possibility that the next generation could still inherit a world where these animals still roam free, not just in memory alone, but in wild places where they belong.

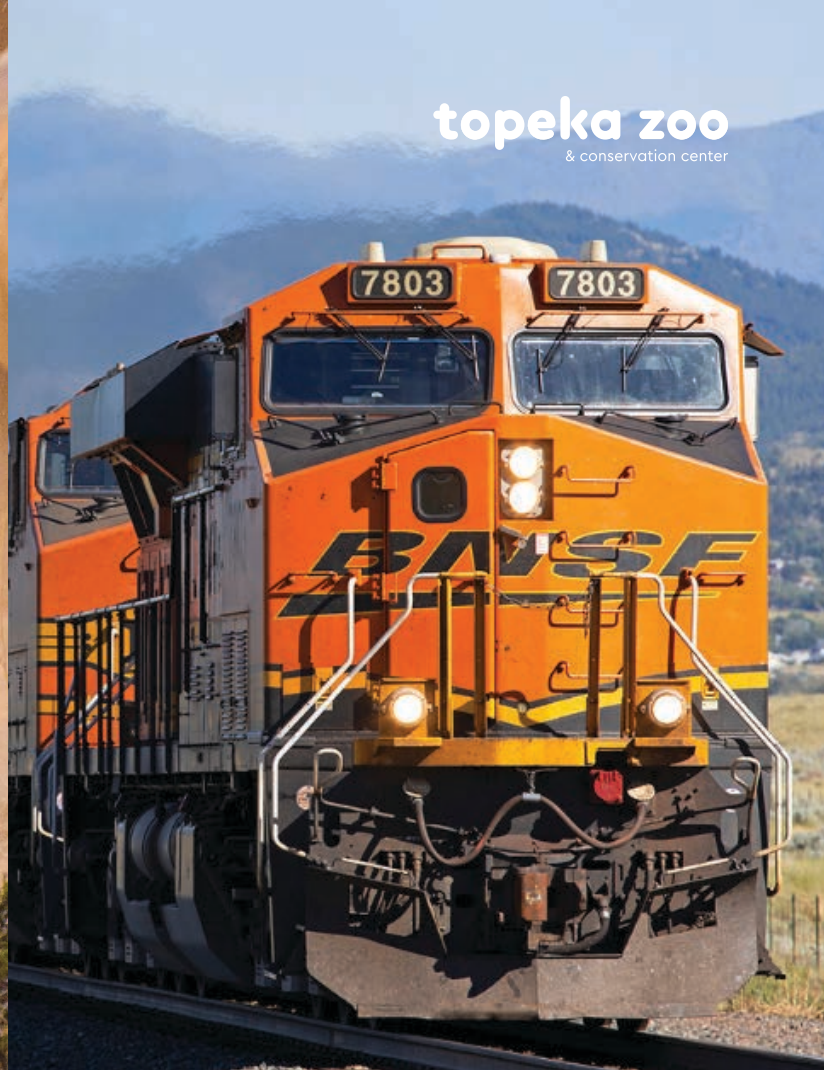




Black Rhinos By the Numbers:

- **Rhino Species Worldwide:** 5 species remain on Earth (Black, White, Greater One-Horned, Javan, and Sumatran)
- **Black Rhino Subspecies:** Historically 4 subspecies; today, 3 survive after the western black rhino was declared extinct in 2011.
- **Population (Then):** ~65,000 in 1970; as many as 100,000+ across Africa in the 20th century.
- **Population (Lowest Point):** ~2,300 in the early 1990s after a 96–98% collapse due to poaching.
- **Population (Now):** ~6,500–6,800 in the wild today—still critically endangered.
- **Geographic Range (Then):** Once widespread across much sub-Saharan Africa in 20+ countries.
- **Geographic Range (Now):** The majority (94%) live in 4 countries, in fragmented, heavily protected populations.
- **Horn Size & Weight:** Black rhinos have two horns: A single front horn can grow up to 55 inches long; large horns can weigh between 3.3 and 6.6 pounds.
- **Illegal Trade Value:** Rhino horn can sell for tens of thousands of dollars per pound on the black market—worth more than gold by weight in some cases.
- **Poaching Impact:** Approximately 9,000 black rhinos were killed during the last decade for their horns.*

**This stark reality underscores the urgency: despite a fragile recovery, every black rhino alive today exists because of intensive protection, and every loss still pushes the species closer to the brink of extinction.*



RHINO VS. RAILROAD: Power in Motion

While vastly different in scale, both the black rhino and a freight train embody raw, unstoppable force. Each pairs tremendous weight with forward drive, creating momentum that demands respect. One is a marvel of nature, the other of engineering, but both demonstrate how power emerges when mass and motion collide.

WEIGHT

- **Black rhino:** 1,800–3,100 pounds
- **Freight train:** 200+ tons

HEIGHT

- **Black rhino:** ~5–6 feet at the shoulder
- **Freight train:** ~15–16 feet tall

SPEED

- **Black rhino:** up to 34 mph
- **Freight train:** typically, 50–60 mph

MOMENTUM (Mass × Speed)

- A charging black rhino combines immense mass with surprising speed—delivering explosive, concentrated force in a single direction
- A freight train builds staggering momentum over distance—once in motion, it can take more than a mile to stop

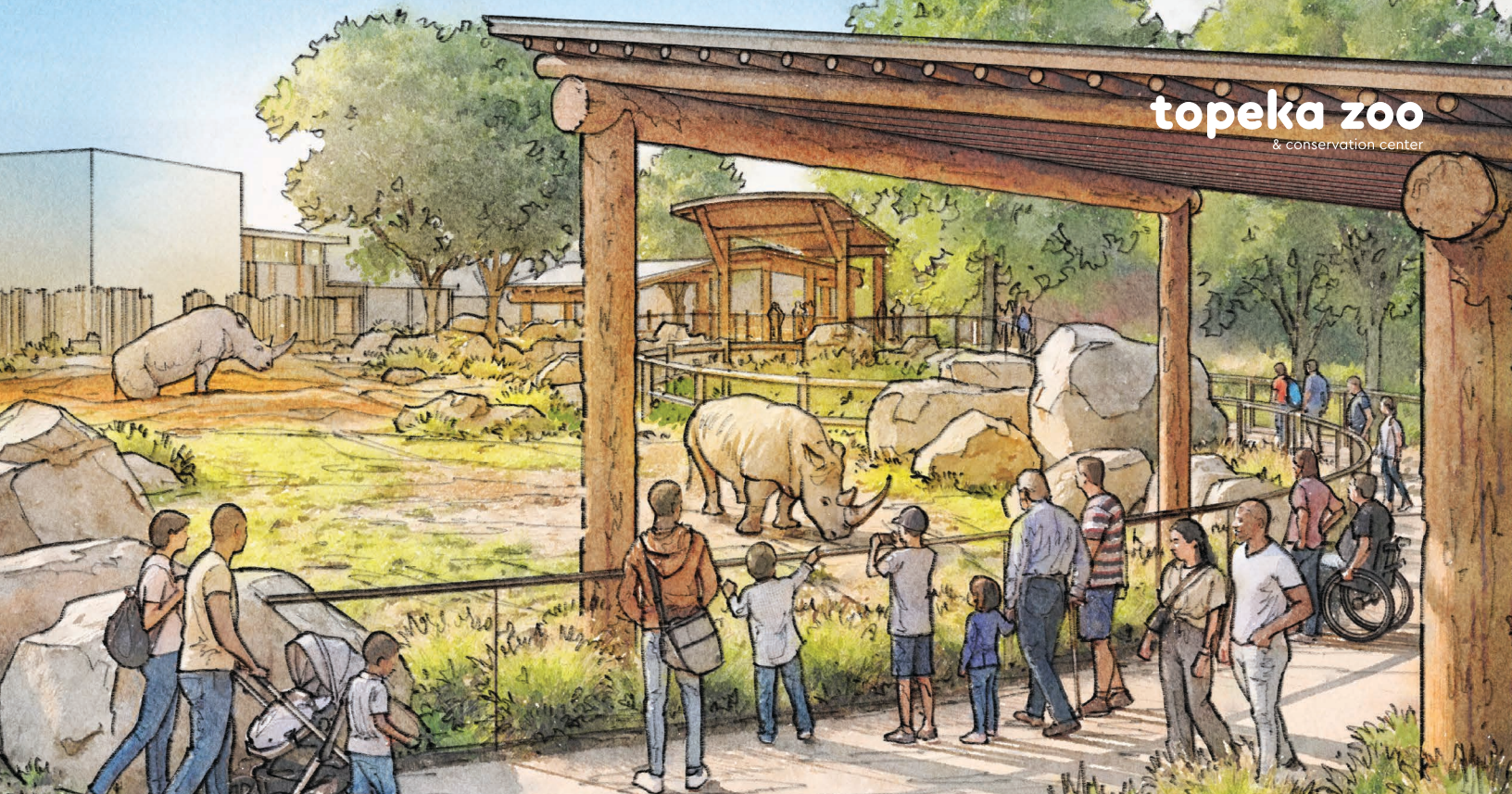
ENGINEERS OF THE WILD:

Rhinos, Bison, and the Shaping of Grassland Ecosystems

Rhinos in Africa and the great animals of the Kansas prairie, both today and in the past, play remarkably similar roles as architects of their ecosystems. On the African savanna, the black rhino acts as a keystone browser, feeding on shrubs and woody plants that helps prevent overgrowth and keeps grasslands open for a wide variety of species. It also disperses seeds through its dung, supporting plant regeneration and biodiversity across the landscape.

Historically, Kansas prairies were shaped in much the same way by animals like the American bison and elk. Their grazing maintained healthy grasslands, their movement spread nutrients, and their wallowing created small habitats that supported diverse plant life. In both systems, these large mammals are essential to ecological balance, when they decline, landscapes shift, biodiversity drops, and the natural relationships that sustain ecosystem health begin to unravel.





A NEW HOME FOR BLACK RHINOS: Conservation and Connection at the Topeka Zoo

At Topeka Zoo, an outdoor black rhino habitat will be designed to resemble natural savanna environments, with open space, varied terrain, shade, mud wallows, and native vegetation to support the animals' wellbeing. This enriched setting will encourage natural behaviors such as foraging, roaming, and resting while promoting overall health.

The habitat will also support long-term breeding success by allowing compatible rhinos to interact in a calm, naturalistic environment. Carefully placed guest viewing areas will provide clear, respectful sightlines into the space, allowing visitors to observe the rhinos without disrupting their comfort or behavior.

As a conservation breeding center, the Topeka Zoo will play a meaningful role in the global effort to safeguard rhinos, and successful births of black rhinos will serve as powerful, living symbols of conservation success, bringing pride to our community and reinforcing what is possible through dedicated efforts.

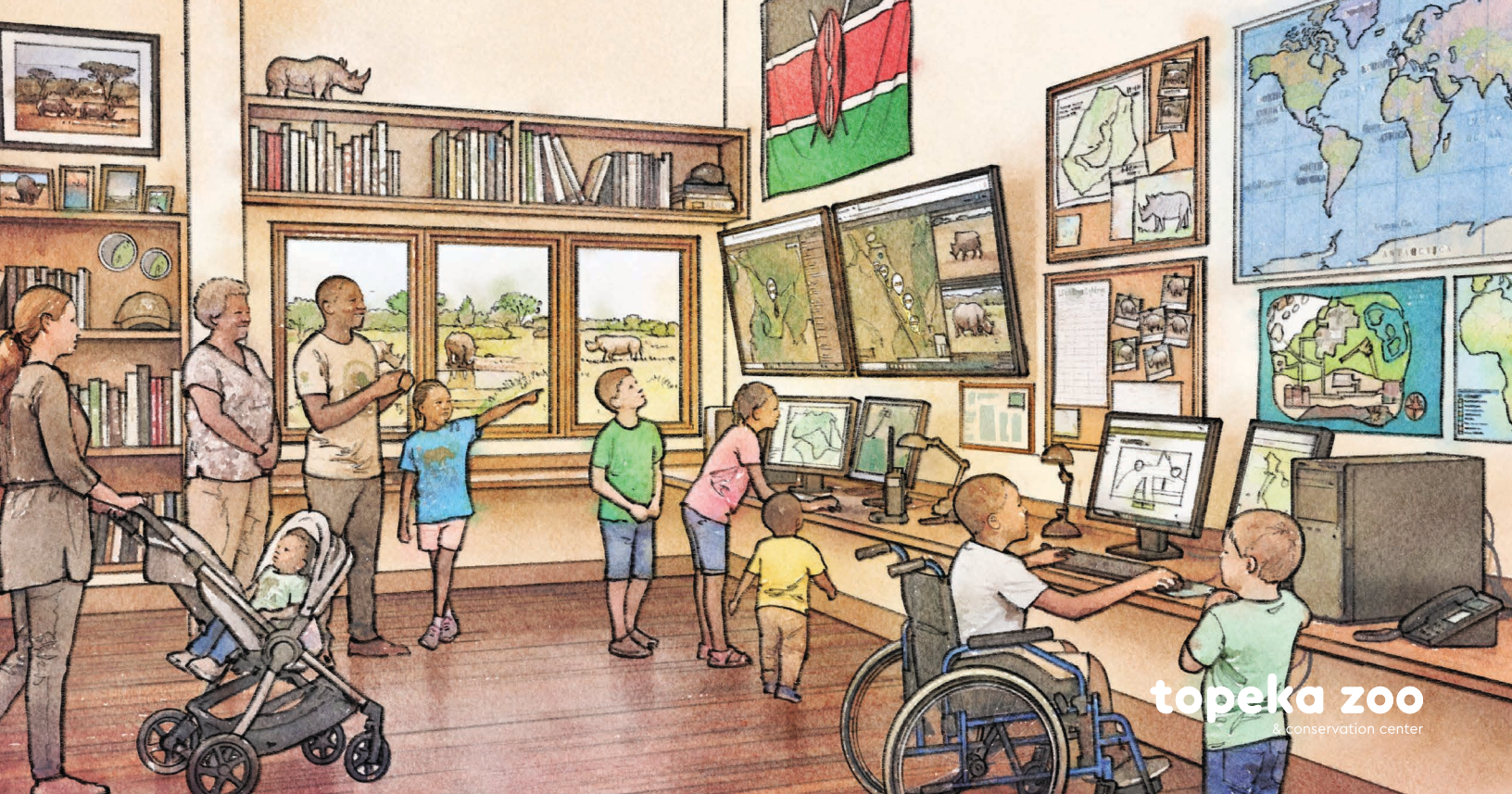




FRONTLINE GUARDIANS:

The Lifesaving Role of Rangers in Protecting Black Rhinos

The survival of the black rhino depends not only on conservation science and policy, but on the courage of wildlife rangers who serve as frontline guardians in some of the most remote and dangerous landscapes on Earth. Working long hours in extreme conditions, they patrol vast territories on foot and in vehicles, tracking rhinos, monitoring behavior, and responding to threats where poaching can be constant and often heavily armed. Their presence alone can deter danger, but when it does arise, they are the first and sometimes only line of defense, carrying out every patrol with the shared goal of keeping rhinos alive.

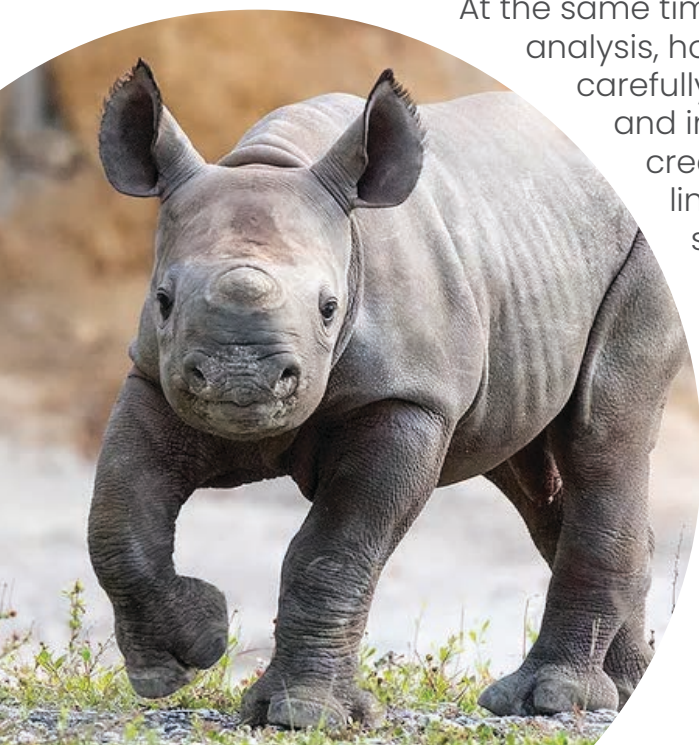


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RHINO 2.0: Where Technology Drives Curiosity and Conservation

Conservation of the black rhino is increasingly shaped by advanced technology, especially artificial intelligence and reproductive science, which together strengthens both immediate protection and long-term survival. AI-powered camera traps and sensors identify individual rhinos, track movement, and detect potential poaching threats, while machine learning systems help conservation teams analyze data quickly and respond more effectively across large landscapes.

At the same time, reproductive technologies such as genetic analysis, hormone monitoring, and assisted breeding support carefully managed pairings that increase genetic diversity and improve population resilience. Together, these tools create a coordinated, science-driven approach that links real-time protection in the wild with long-term species recovery.



In a hands-on technology learning space, young visitors will also be able to engage directly with simplified versions of these conservation tools. Through interactive activities like tracking simulated rhino movements, analyzing data, and exploring how monitoring systems work, kids will gain a practical understanding of how technology, science, and teamwork come together to protect endangered wildlife.

RHINO DOGS IN ACTION:

Supporting Frontline Anti-Poaching Efforts

The International Rhino Foundation's "rhino dogs" are specially trained K9 units that work alongside rangers to protect black rhinos and other species from poaching. Deployed in remote, high-risk areas, they track human scent over long distances, detect hidden weapons and illegal wildlife products, and help locate poachers in protected landscapes. As part of rapid-response teams, they extend the reach of ranger patrols and can follow trails that are hours or even days old, helping intercept threats before they reach rhinos.

These dogs act as powerful force multipliers in conservation, standing alongside rangers who risk their lives in the field. Together, they form a critical frontline defense that turns speed, skill, and teamwork into survival for endangered rhino populations. Through support of this initiative, Topeka Zoo contributes to strengthening real-world conservation efforts and the teams working to protect these species.



Photos courtesy of International Rhino Foundation



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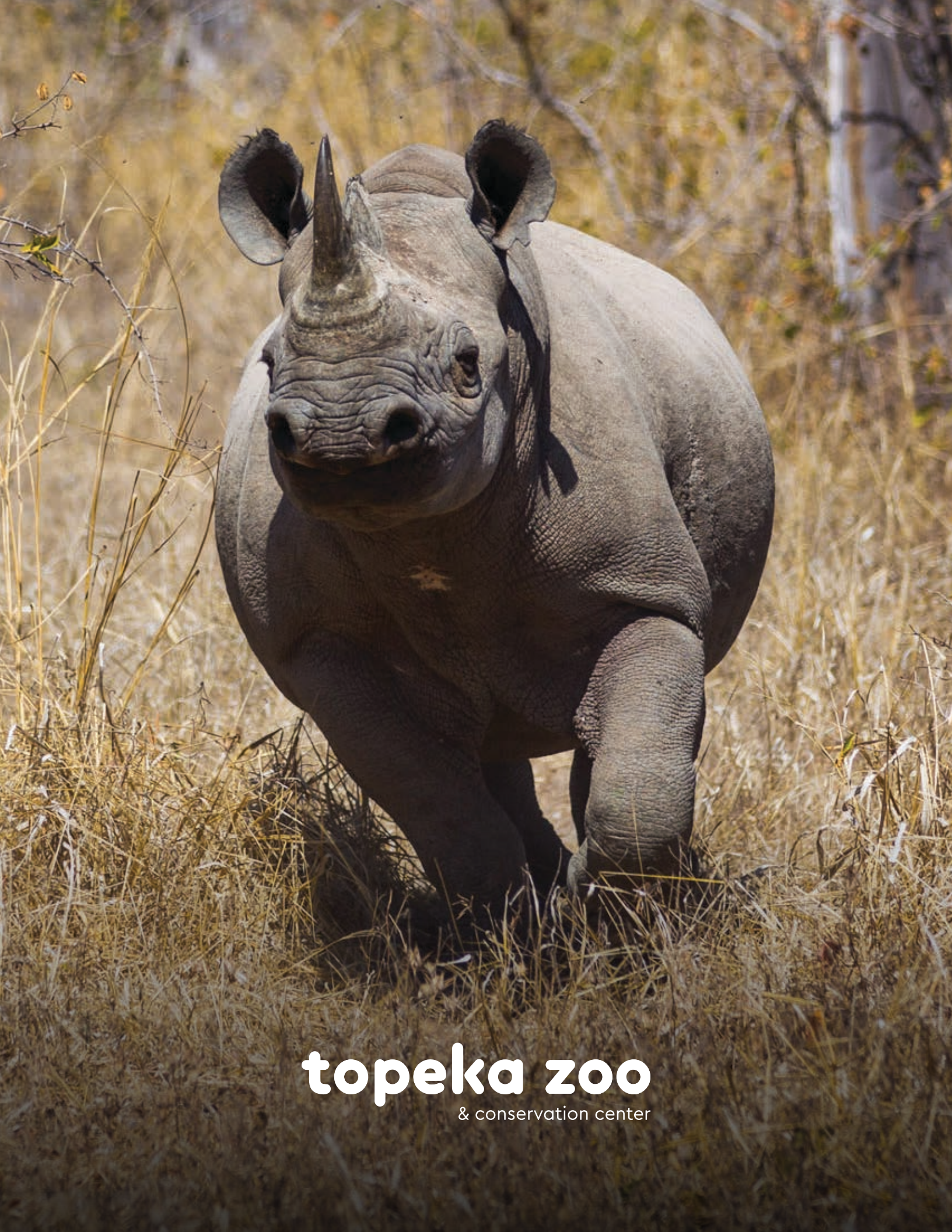
UP CLOSE WITH BLACK RHINOS: Feeding Encounters and Year-Round Viewing

A black rhino feeding encounter will allow visitors to stand just feet away from these rare yet gentle giants while offering them a treat under their caregiver's supervision. Watching the black rhino carefully grasp the food with its unique finger-like upper lip and hearing its heavy breaths will create a feeling of awe and connection, making it a truly one-of-a-kind and memorable experience.

The indoor "rhino bedroom" will extend that connection year-round, giving guests a unique opportunity to observe and connect with the black rhinos in a comfortable, close-up setting. Large open-air stalls and viewing areas will allow visitors to see the rhinos' daily behaviors, personalities, and interactions regardless of the weather, creating a deeper appreciation for these incredible animals.

Together, these experiences will offer an engaging and educational way to strengthen the bond between guests and wildlife while inspiring lasting support for rhino conservation.





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