INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION

The Scoop on Rhino Poop

We can actually learn a lot about individual rhinos as well as populations by studying feces, and rhinos learn a lot about each other by being able to "read" information contained in dung. New scientific methodologies allow us to use feces to identify individuals and their genetic relatedness, to diagnose pregnancy and reproductive status, and all sorts of things that help us to understand what's going on with individuals as well as populations.

Rhinos prune bushes, small trees and shrubs as they eat, and when they defecate, they disperse seeds which eventually germinate and grow. The plant material that rhinos eat is difficult to digest, rhinos that defecate in water can indirectly provide nutrients for other species, like fish, which eat their dung.

1. Black Rhinos (~3,725 left) mark their territories in "middens," or dung piles, which are message stations for other rhinos. A rhino will sniff the pile deeply, shuffle through it, then defecate in the same spot.

2. Sumatran Rhinos (<275 left) spend most of the day in wallows. These rhinos don't spread dung around as Black Rhinos do, instead they drag their foot for several meters and mark scrapes with secretions of the foot gland.

3. Javan Rhinos (~40-60 left) live deep in the Indonesian rain forest and like to wallow in mud to keep cool. Males mark their territory with dung piles and urine spraying. Javan Rhinos are so rare that sometimes the only way we can monitor populations is through their excretions (poop).

4. Greater One-Horned, or Indian Rhinos (~2,619 left) are usually loners, but they do share bathing pools, wallows, and dung heaps. This allows them to leave behind information (contained in feces) for other rhinos to "read."

5. White Rhinos (~14,500 left) are the least endangered of all of the rhino species. They mark their territories much like the Black Rhino using "middens," which provide information for other rhinos.

While all five rhino species remain in terrible peril - from poaching, from forest loss and habitat conversion, and from human settlements encroaching on their habitats in Africa, Indonesia, and India – all are in better shape than might be expected because of the International Rhino Foundation's work, and we believe there is great reason for optimism.

Visit the International Rhino Foundation website at www.rhinos-irf.org for more information.