



Rhino Guards

What is the black rhino?

- Black rhinos are a critically endangered species.
- They grow up to 1.5m in height, 3.5m in length and can reach 13 000kg in weight.

Illustration: The oxpecker on the black rhino.

Oxpecker Birds Help Black Rhinos!

Black rhinos are an **endangered** species that are often hunted by **poachers**. However, they may have a secret tool to help them avoid **detection**.

Scientists discovered rhinos carrying oxpecker birds on their backs are more likely to avoid humans.

Black rhinos are hunted for their horns. They have very poor eyesight. One of the scientists, Roan Plotz, said, "Hunters approaching from downwind could walk within five metres and not be noticed."

Scientists found that rhinos without oxpeckers detected humans only a quarter of the time humans approached them.

But, those which had oxpeckers with them detected humans every time. The little birds gave a helpful warning signal of danger to the rhino.

This helped the rhinos notice humans 61m away. That is four times further than the rhinos can on their own. Roan Plotz said the evidence suggests oxpeckers are "effective

companions" to the rhinos. So, why do the birds help? It's all down to something that oxpeckers find delicious!

Oxpeckers eat **ticks** and other insects that feed on the rhino's skin. Scientists think that by warning the rhino of dangers, they are protecting their own food.

The scientists now want to see how adding more birds to the area could help keep the rhinos more alert. They want to investigate to see if this makes a difference.

Glossary

endangered	A species which is at high risk of extinction.
poachers	Someone who illegally hunts animals.
detection	To identify the presence of something.
ticks	Small insects that eat and live on rhino's skin.

Questions

1. How far away could rhinos detect humans with the help of oxpeckers?

- 60m
- 61m
- 62m
- 63m

2. 'However, they may have a secret tool to avoid detection.'

What is the rhino's secret tool?

3. Oxpeckers are 'effective companions'.

This suggests that...

- The birds are good at helping the rhinos.
- The birds are best friends with the rhinos.
- The rhinos like the birds' company.
- The poachers are scared of the birds.

4. Put a tick next to each statement to show whether it is true or false.

	True	False
Rhinos with birds were alerted to humans every time.		
The birds might give a warning to help protect their food source.		
Black rhinos are endangered.		
The scientists want to protect the rhinos from the birds.		

5. 'Could help keep the rhinos alert.'

Tick the word that is closest in meaning to 'alert'.

- aware
- fed
- hungry
- quiet

6. Summarise the story in 20 words or fewer.

Answers

1. How far away could rhinos detect humans with the help of oxpeckers?

- 60m
- 61m**
- 62m
- 63m

2. 'However, they may have a secret tool to avoid detection.'

What is the rhino's secret tool?

The oxpecker is the rhino's secret tool.

3. Oxpeckers are 'effective companions'.

This suggests that...

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	True	False
Rhinos with birds were alerted to humans every time.	✓	
The birds might give a warning to help protect their food source.	✓	
Black rhinos are endangered.	✓	
The scientists want to protect the rhinos from the birds.		✓

5. 'Could help keep the rhinos alert.'

Tick the word that is closest in meaning to 'alert'.

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6. Summarise the story in 20 words or fewer.

Accept any reasonable summary that is 20 words or fewer, e.g. Scientists have discovered that rhinos which carry oxpecker birds are alerted to humans which helps them avoid hunters.