

Ear notch system for rhinos

It is impossible to run a good animal breeding project without having an easy and reliable means of visually identifying different animals. In this article we focus on the white rhino.



Ear tags, as commonly used in cattle, come in different sizes and colours and make for easy and accurate visual identification of animals. They can be applied for identification in rhino but have a couple of disadvantages:

- 🐾 They are prone to tear out, especially in rhinos kept in camps with dense bush (Figure 1).
- 🐾 Unless the numbers are burnt into the tags, they often fade with time. As a result, this is usually used as a temporary rhino marking method.
- 🐾 Ear tags are not easily accepted by tourists and should thus not be used in nature reserves and parks open to tourists.



Figure 1 Rhino with an ear tag (l) and a rhino where the ear tag ripped out, leaving a tear in the ear (r)

Making use of **ear notches** is the more commonly used visual identification method for rhinos. Individual animals are recognisable based on a specific pattern of ear notches that are cut out of a rhino's ear, where the location of notches is linked to a numbering system. The sum of the numbers is the individual's identification number.

The advantage of this system is that it permanently identifies animals and is well tolerated by tourists. A potential disadvantage is that this may clash with the system applied by potential buyers of some of these animals.



Figure 2 Notches are cut out when the rhino is immobilized, for example during dehorning or DNA sample taking

Different countries have different numbering systems and there is no universal system everyone is using. Zimbabwe, Kruger National Park; all use a different notch system. In Namibia we usually see the system according to Figure 3.

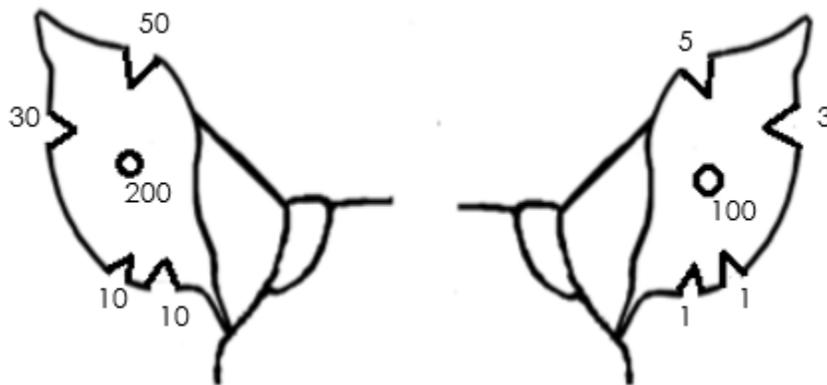


Figure 3 Notch system often seen in Namibia

To distinguish between male and female, different notch shapes can be made; e.g. square notches for males, and triangular notches for females (Figure 4).

It is advisable not to make the notches too big, especially the middle hole easily tears out in dense bush when its big.



Figure 4 Left: female rhino with triangular notches (8).
Left: male rhino showing a square notch (1)

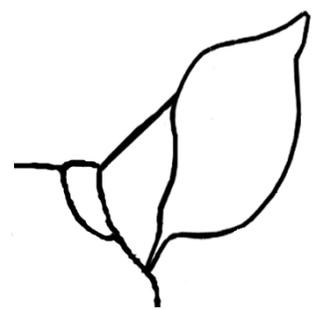
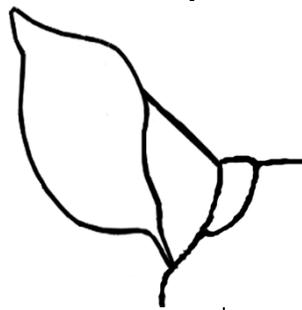
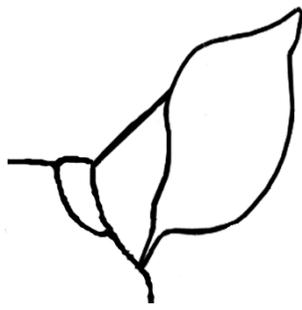
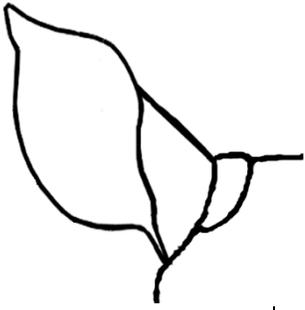


Figure 5 This rhino has 2 notches in the right ear (as seen from the animal); 30 and 10, and 2 notches in the left ear; 3 and 1. Her number is thus 44.

Microchip implants inserted into the thinner, soft skin behind the ears or at the tail base provide both a relatively permanent (microchips may migrate or get damaged) and the only legally accepted means of identifying specific animals and, in the case of a dispute (e.g. an animal breaking out of the property), proving ownership. The obvious disadvantage is that a microchip can only be read with the use of a dedicated chip reader and once an animal is immobilised or dead.

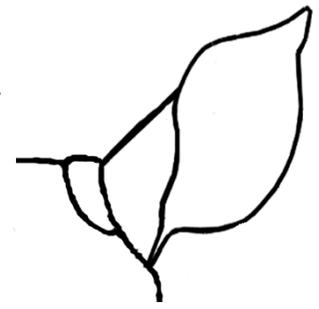
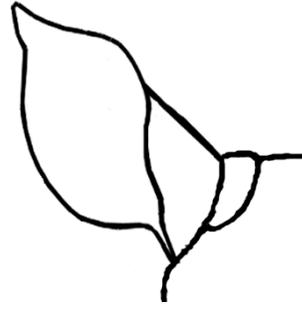
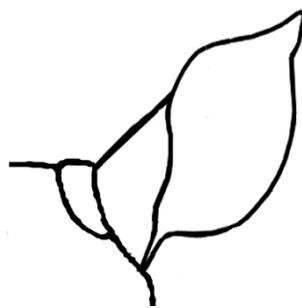
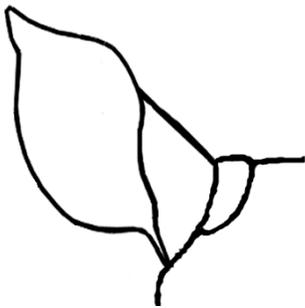
On the next page you can find a sheet in where you can draw notches to identify your rhinos in the field.

Namibian white rhino ear notch system



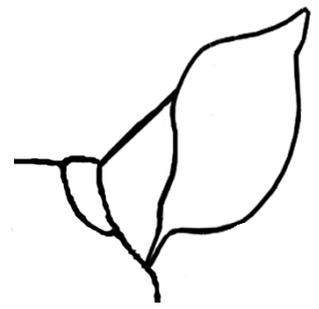
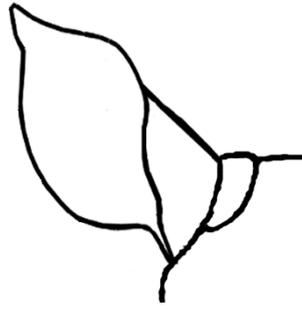
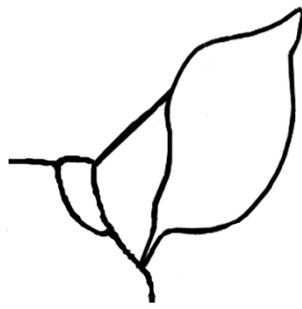
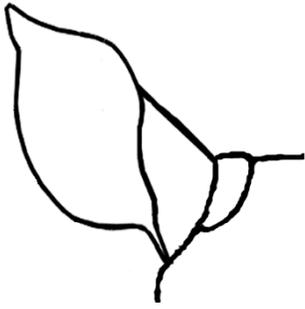
Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:

Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:



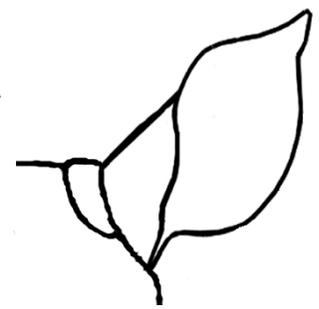
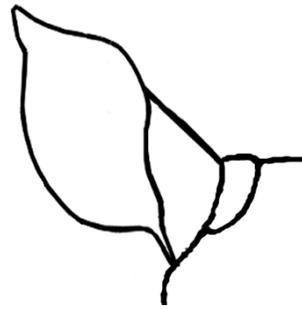
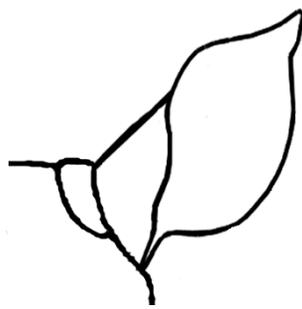
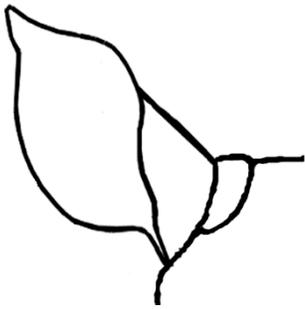
Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:

Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:



Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:

Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:



Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex:

Notch:	Name:
DoB:	Sex: