

AFRICAN WILDLIFE - MAMMALS



GIRAFFES

There are nine recognized subspecies of giraffe: Nigerian, Kordofan, Nubian, reticulated, Rothschild, Masai, Thornicroft, Angolan and South African or Cape.

Description and Characteristics:

The Giraffe is the tallest of all mammals, on average they are 6ft tall at birth. They are well known for their long necks, long legs, and spotted patterns; each giraffe has it's own unique pattern. Giraffes have small "horns" or knobs on top of their heads that grow to be about five inches long. These knobs are used to protect the head in fights.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

Their long necks help giraffes eat leaves from tall trees, typically acacia trees. The tongue of a giraffe can be as long as 45 cm.

If they need to, giraffes can go for several days without water. Instead of drinking, giraffes rely on remaining hydrated from the moisture content in the leaves they feed on.

Habitat:

Giraffes live in the savannahs of Africa, where they roam freely among the tall acacia trees, arid land, dense forests and open plains. Large populations of giraffe are found in Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia.

Size & Lifespan

Males weigh between 2,400 and 4,000 pounds and are up to 18 feet tall. Female giraffes are smaller and lighter than males, and weight between 1,600 and 2,600 pounds and grow to be about 16 feet tall. A giraffe calf can be up to 6 ft tall at birth

Giraffes live for about 25 years in the wild

Reproduction:

The gestation period for giraffes is between 14-15 months. Generally there 16-month period between calving since this is such a long gestation period. Breeding can occur at any time of the year, with the conception peak generally happening the rainy season

Predators and Threats:

There is not direct threat to adult Giraffes from predators as they are too large. However, their calves are vulnerable and cannot defend themselves from usually lion and the spotted hyena.

Giraffes are hunted for their meat, coat and tails. The tail is prized for good luck bracelets, fly whisks and string for sewing beads. The coat is used for shield coverings. Habitat destruction and fragmentation are threats to giraffe populations.



AFRICAN ELEPHANT

The African elephant is the largest land mammal on Earth. There are two species of African Elephant: African savanna, *Loxodonta africana*); African forest (*Africana cyclotis*)

Description and Characteristics:

The African Elephant has a marked dip between its fore and hindquarters giving a concave curvature to its back. It's ears are large and fan-like and are also used to control body temperature; blood circulating through the large vessels in the ears is cooled by flapping. They have acute hearing.

Large tusks are present in both sexes, they first appear at the age of about two and continue to grow throughout their lives. Elephants use tusks for peeling bark off trees, digging for roots, herding young, "drilling" for water and sometimes as a weapon. Skin is up to 2.5 cm thick in places

The trunk is probably the most fascinating feature of the elephant - it has two prehensile protrusions at the tip (the Asian elephant has only one). It is used for eating, drinking, dust and water bathing, as well as an important form of communication. The trunk also shows the mood of an elephant - it uses it's trunk to end off other elephants and intruders and also uses it as a punching or thrusting weapon. An elephant has a strong sense of smell and can locate water by smelling the earth above.

An elephant has very small eyes in relation to its head and has poor eyesight.

Elephants form deep family bonds and live in tight social units. A family is led by an older matriarch and typically includes three or four of her offspring and their young. Males tend to leave the family unit between the ages of 12 and 15 and may lead solitary adult lives.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

Elephants spend about 16 hours a day eating, their daily intake is between 4 and 7% of bodyweight. Elephants drink up to 160 liters of water per day. Their diet is varied and includes grass, leaves, twigs, bark and fruit.

Habitat:

Elephants are found, south of the Sahara, in 37 different countries in Africa, but are most popular in Southern and Eastern Africa. Food and water needs to be plentiful.

Size & Lifespan

The male elephant is much larger than the female - Males elephants grow up to 3.5m and Females up to 2.7m. Males can weight up 6 tons whilst females up to 2.7 tons. The life expectancy of an elephant is up to 60 years

Reproduction:

Elephants do not have any specific mating season. The gestation period for elephant is 20-22 months. Calves weigh about 120kg at birth and they are born throughout the year. They are weaned at 3-8 years, generally just before the birth of the next calf. A cow can give birth every 3-4 years

Predators and Threats:

Elephants have no natural enemies for they not a predator themselves and there is none large enough to challenge him. However, their future is threatened by increasing human populations which causes the loss of their natural habitat - plus the continuing ivory trade.



AFRICAN LION

Lions are unique in that they are the only cats to live in groups (prides). They are the largest member of the cat family and the largest of all the African carnivores. They are the top predator in any African ecosystem where they live.

Description and Characteristics:

Lions are Tawny in colour, varying from silvery yellow to reddish brown with paler undersides (female belly yellowish to almost white); yellow to black mane. Faint, leopard like spots are generally found on the young which is sometimes kept into maturity.

Males have thick mane around the head that extend down the chest between the forelegs and varies in colour from blond to black, whereas females do not have manes

Lions have massive shoulders and strong forelimbs, long, sharp claws, and short, powerful jaws. A Lions' roar can be heard by humans more than 8 km away.

Prides of lions are generally composed of related females, whilst a typical prides contains around 13 lions, large prides can contain as many as 40 lions, while some prides will have a few as two members. A prides home range varies in size from 20-400 km².

Lions are mainly nocturnal and are reputed to sleep or rest for about 20 hours a day. You will often find them lying under a shady bush, particularly after they've fed following a kill.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

As carnivores, feeding entirely on the flesh of other mammals, lions have 30 teeth, including large piercing canines to grab and kill prey, scissorlike molars to slice into flesh, and small incisors to scrape meat from bones. Much of their hunting is done at night and in the very early dawn. When feeding on a large kill, a lion can eat almost 36 kg of meat in one feeding and then not need to eat for several days. On average, a lion needs to eat about 5 kg of meat daily.

Habitat:

The lion is found throughout the south Sahara desert and in parts of southern and eastern Africa. They are generally seen on grassy plains, savannas, and dry woodlands but never seen in heavily forested areas. The lion can be found in most of the National Parks and Reserves in Africa.

Size & Lifespan

Males reach up to a shoulder height of 1.2meters and weight between 150-250kgs, females are smaller and reach a shoulder height of 1.05m and weigh up between 120 -180 kgs. Lions live for 12-16 years in the wild and 25 years in captivity.

Reproduction:

A lioness has a gestation period of about 110 days, after which she can give birth to up to four cubs. Generally she gives birth in a secluded area away from the group and introduces the cubs to the pride when they are about eight weeks old. Very often, several females give birth at about the same time, and they share the duties of protecting and nursing the cubs. Mothers nurse for up to 8 months, although they begin to take cubs to eat at animal kills when they are as young as 3 months old. At about 11 months of age, cubs start learning to hunt with the pride. Females take care of their young until they are about two, when the mother is ready to produce a new litter.

Predators and Threats:

Although the population of lions is declining, they are not currently listed as endangered or threatened. Threats include hunting, loss of habitat and human encroachment.



ZEBRA

The most common species of Zebra found in Africa is the Plains/Burchell's Zebra. Other species found are the very rare and endangered Cape Mountain Zebra; Hartmann's Zebra (a subspecies of mountain zebra) found mainly in Namibia; Grévy's zebra, found mostly in Kenya.

Photo by Peter Frank

Description and Characteristics:

Related to the horse, a Burchell's Zebra is of stocky build with wide black and white stripes that run diagonally and lengthways on the rump and continue on to the belly, all the way down to hooves. The mane is upright and striped to match the neck. The tail is striped with a dark tassel. Zebra stripes are as individual as a human fingerprint.

Grévy's zebra has narrow stripes set closely together. Horizontal stripes on the haunches, shoulders, and legs are short and fine and extend all the way down the legs to the hooves. The mountain zebra has wider stripes than the Grévy's zebra, particularly on its rump.

On both Grévy's zebra and the Mountain Zebra the underside of the belly is completely or mainly white, which differs from the Plains/Burchell's zebra whose stripes wrap around from the back to the belly.

Zebra's, although nervous and jumpy, are a very sociable animals and generally found in large herds with other herbivores such as antelopes, wildebeest, giraffe and buffalo.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

Zebra are exclusively grazers, eating over 50 different species of grasses.

Habitat:

The Plains/Burchell's Zebra lives throughout the grasslands, savanna, and scrub of East Africa, reaching as far as Angola in the west generally in close proximity of a permanent water source. Grévy's zebra lives in grasslands and thorny scrublands on the borders of northern Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The mountain zebra lives in the high ground of South Africa, and in the coastal hills of Namibia and Angola.

Size & Lifespan

Male Plains/Burchell's Zebras can weigh up to 300 Kg and have a shoulder height of about 50 inches

whilst females are a little smaller. Grévy's zebras weigh up to 450 kg and both sexes weigh about the same. Zebra's can live up to 30 years old but generally the life expectancy in the wild is about 12 years due to predators.

Reproduction:

Females are about 3 years old when they give birth to their first foal. The gestation period lasts for about 12 months and the foal is usually suckled for 6 months. For males, breeding often does not begin until age five or six.

Predators and Threats:

Zebra's are prey to lions and spotted hyenas. The Plains/Burchell's/Chapman's Zebra is threatened by hunting and by habitat change from ranching and other kinds of farming. Both the Grévy's zebra and the mountain zebra are listed as endangered on the Red List of Threatened Species.

The Grévy's zebra is threatened both by hunting and by local livestock that compete with it for water and food. Its range has shrunk dramatically, and it is now so small that environmental hazards, such as drought, can easily affect the entire species.



CHEETAH

Description and Characteristics:

The cheetah is the fastest land mammal in the world and can reach speeds of 80-100 km/h. However, it is only able to keep up this speed for a short period of time. The cheetah has a slender body, a small head, and long legs, which makes it ideal for speed, it is also the only cat without retractable claws which allows the claws to always be exposed, makes for better traction when running. The tail is also adapted to help maintain balance at high speeds and during quick turns.

The cheetah has a background colour of light golden yellow/tan, covered with small, round, black spots on the cheeks, forehead, crown, neck, and limbs. They have a distinctive black tear-shaped from the corner of the eye to the corner of the mouth and a mane-like black stripe running the length of their back.

Cheetahs do not roar like lions and tigers. Instead, they make birdlike chirping sounds for communication with other members of the family and they hiss when angered or threatened and purr loudly when they are content. If they are alarmed they whine or growl.

A cheetah has a good sense of smell and communicate by scenting tree trunks, bushes and termite mounds with their waste.

Cheetahs are typically solitary creatures although males sometimes live with a small group of brothers from the same litter.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

The cheetah's diet consists of impala, springbok, gazelles, kob, warthogs, lesser kudu, blackbuck, hares, and game birds. Male coalitions sometimes take larger prey such as wildebeest. They generally stalk their prey until they are only about 20 meters away, then they chase, which lasts about 20 seconds. The cheetah is only successful in catching its prey in about half of all chases and they often lose their catch to lions and hyenas. Unlike other large cats, the cheetah generally hunts during the

daytime.

Habitat:

Cheetahs are confined to parts of Eastern and Southwestern Africa. They are well adapted to dry habitats such as savanna grasslands and semi-deserts. Cheetahs prefer grasslands that offer unobstructed views of their surroundings; such habitats make it easier to detect prey as well as predators.

Size & Lifespan

Male cheetahs are slightly larger and heavier than females. Cheetahs are approx. 95 cm tall, and measures 182 cm in length. Males weigh about 55 kgs and females about 40 kg. On average a cheetah lives for 12 - 14 years in the wild

Reproduction:

The gestation period is usually 3 months and a female gives birth to between 2 and 6 cubs. They breed throughout the year and it is the female who raises the cubs. A cub stays with its mother for about one year before venturing off by itself. The male cheetah plays no part in the upbringing. Cubs are smoky grey in colour with long woolly hair, called a mantle, running along their backs.

Predators and Threats:

Cheetahs are often killed by lions and hyenas, especially their cubs. Up to 80% of the cubs do not survive. In recent years human encroachment on their habitat and hunting has dramatically reduced their numbers.



RHINOCEROS

Description and Characteristics:

There are two types of Rhino found in Africa - the Black Rhino and the White Rhino. Black Rhinos are more rare than White Rhino

The white rhino has a more prominent square lip, are larger than black rhino and are not as aggressive as black rhinos. Black Rhinos have a pointed mouth with a hooked lip. Black and White Rhinos are grey in colour.

Both the black and white Rhino have two horns, the longer of which is in the front. They are made of keratin which is the same material as hooves, fingernails and hair. The horns grow out of the skin.

Rhinos survival has been threatened by the high demand for their horns over the years - in the 1970's there was demand for their horns from the Arabs who used them in production of dagger handles. There is a high demand for rhino horn from Asia who use them in traditional medicine and ornamental carvings.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

White Rhinos are grass eaters (grazers), Black Rhinos are browsers, eating a large variety of vegetation, including leaves, buds and shoots of plants, bushes and trees.

Habitat:

Black rhinos have various habitats, but are mainly found in areas with dense, woody vegetation. White rhinos live in savannah's with close access to waterholes, mud wallows and shady trees.

Size & Lifespan

The white rhino is larger and heavier than the black rhino.

White Rhino weighing 1,800 - 2,700 kg. Height: 5 - 6 ft (1.5 - 1.8 m) tall at shoulder, Length: 12.5-15 ft (3.8-5m) length of head and body

Black Rhino weighing 800 - 1,350 kg, Height: 4.5 - 5.5 ft (1.4 - 1.7 m) tall at shoulder. Length: 10- 12.5 ft (3.0-3.8m) length of head and body

The white rhino lives to about 50 years and the black rhino about 30-35 years in the wild and 35-45+ years in captivity

Reproduction:

White Rhino: Gestation period is approximately 16 months with a birth interval of 1 calf every 2 to 3 years .

Black Rhino: Gestation period is approximately 15 to 16 months. Birth intervals of a single calf, every 2.5 to 4 years.

A calf will remain with her mother anything for 2-4 years

Predators and Threats:

Man has been the main predators of the Rhino - poaching them for their horns. Efforts are ongoing to save the rhino from extinction.



HIPPOPOTAMUS

Description and Characteristics:

There are two species of hippopotamuses; the Pygmy Hippo which is the smaller species, standing about waist-high to an adult human, and the river or common hippopotamus. The common/river hippopotamus which is world's third largest and heaviest land animals, weighing up to about 4,000 kg.

Both species of hippos have barrel-shaped bodies, short stocky legs, and smooth almost hairless skin. Their heads appear outsized with unusually broad mouths and their facial features resemble those of a pig. Hippos have a short, tufted tail

Hippos have thin skin that dries out quickly - they secrete a pinkish coloured oil that helps them keep their skin moist in the hot African climate. Hippos spend most of their days in the water or wallowing in the mud, generally coming up on land to feed at night.

River hippos are one of the most feared animals in southern Africa. It is claimed that every year more people are killed by them than by any other African animal

Out of water, Hippos are surprisingly fast runners; a fully grown river hippo can run 30 km/h for a few hundred yards.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

Hippos are Herbivores, preferring short grasses of the African plains. Their muscular lips are almost 70 cms wide which makes them extremely efficient grazers. They generally feed during the night, grazing for up to 5 hours before returning to the water.

Habitat:

The Pygmy hippo lives in West Africa's forest belt, primarily in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and spends more of its time near water rather than in it, and dives beneath the water surface only when in imminent danger of attack.

The common hippopotamus is found in western, central, eastern and southern parts of Africa, living in lakes and rivers near grasslands, usually where the water is deep and slow-flowing.

Size & Lifespan

Male hippos are generally larger and heavier than females. Common Hippos range from 3.96 to 4.57 mtrs long, standing 1.52 mtrs at the shoulder height and weighing between 1,800 to 3,600 kgs. They live for up to anywhere between 20 to 40 years in the wild. Whilst Pygmy hippos grow to about 1.75 m long, and have a maximum weight of about 275 kg.

Reproduction:

Males reach sexual maturity at 7 years and females at 9 years. Mating always occurs in water during the dry season. Hippos have a gestation period of about 7 months and usually birth is given to a single calf during the start of the raining season. River hippos of the give birth usually in shallow water therefore calves are able to swim from birth. The average birthing interval is about 2 years

Predators and Threats:

Pygmy Hippos are very rare in the wild, with hunting and deforestation having declined their numbers over recent years. Hippo calves are vulnerable to attack by lions and hyenas on land and by crocodiles in the water. People hunt hippos for their meat and hide and also for their tusks, which are sold as ivory and also because they are potentially dangerous and destructive particularly in areas where crops are grown.



WARTHOG

Description and Characteristics:

A member of the pig family warthogs are black, grey or brown in colour, with dark mane and tail; white cheek whiskers. Their bodies are covered with sparse coarse bristly hair. They have a long face with fleshy warts and protruding tusks.

Warthogs are sociable animals and are usually found in groups consisting of 1 or 2 sows and young offspring. Males (boars) usually travel alone. Boars have more prominent warts than sows. They are primarily used to protect the face

during fights.

Warthogs use burrows for shelter and when entering, the warthog backs in enabling them to defend themselves. In the mornings, warthogs burst out of their burrows at top speed to get a running start on any predators that may be lurking nearby.

Although they look fierce, warthogs would rather run than fight. But they can be fierce opponents if forced.

Feeding/drinking Habits:

Warthogs are grazers feeding mainly on grasses, roots, berries, bark, and occasionally carrion. Warthogs will travel up to 7 km a day in search of good food and water. Whilst grazing, they kneel on their front legs and even move around on their knees.

Habitat:

They are found in most of Africa south of the Sahara and are widely distributed in East Africa. Usually found in savannah and lightly forested areas.

Size & Lifespan

Weighs 50 to 200 kg. 90 to 150 cms in length; standing between 64cm and 85.0 cm tall at the shoulder. Males are heavier and slightly larger than females. They live up to 15 years in the wild.

Reproduction:

Warthogs are seasonal breeders with the mating season taking place when the main rainy season ends. They reach sexual maturity at about 18 to 20 months but males generally do not begin mating until they are 4 years old. The gestation period is between 170 and 175 days. The young usually remain with the mothers for 2 years before venturing off to form their own families.

Predators and Threats:

Warthogs are not currently endangered but they are prey of lions, leopards, Spotted hyena, cheetah and Wild dog.

Source: <http://www.africaguide.com/wildlife/index.htm>