

Animal Life



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An Animal Under Threat

The hippopotamus is native to Africa and can be found south of the Sahara Desert. The main population is in the east of the continent but overall the population is in decline. The animal is listed as 'vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List, a special list that keeps a record of world species. Humans are the hippopotamus's biggest threat. Not only is it hunted for its skin and meat but since the trading of elephant ivory became illegal, hunters have turned to hunting the hippopotamus for its ivory teeth, some of which can measure 60cm in length. Habitats are also decreasing in size. The hippopotamus is known to damage crops and many farmers resent the animal. It is also an aggressive and dangerous animal and has been known to attack humans.

The word 'hippopotamus' is Greek for 'river horse'.

Hippopotamus

Scientific Name: *Hippopotamus amphibious* **Irish Name:** Dobhareach

The hippopotamus is a large animal, with a barrel-shaped body and four short legs and a short tail. On each foot are four toes. It has a huge head and a wide mouth and it can open extremely wide, revealing large curved teeth. Its ears, nostril and eyes are high up on its head so that when most of its body is submerged in water, it is still able



to hear, breath and see. When it dives, it can close its nostrils and ears. As an amphibious animal it needs to take regular dips in water as its body loses water quickly. Because of this, it must live near a water source, such as a lake or river. A hippopotamus can hold its breath under

water for up to five minutes. Though it can move quickly through water, it is not really a swimmer, instead moving about by pushing off the bottom.

A hippopotamus will also live near pastures as its main diet is grass. It consumes about 35 kg of grass each night. During the day it will digest its food, rest on sunny river or lakeside banks and socialise with other hippopotamus.

The skin of the hippopotamus is thick and almost hairless. It was once thought that the hippopotamus sweated blood, but it is actually a pinkish oil secrete from the skin, which is thought to have healing properties, protect it from the sun and helps keep the skin moist.

Family

A female hippo has one calf at a time and carries its young for 8 months. The calf, which weighs approximately 25-45kgs when born, will stay with its mother for a number of years. This family unit might also include other siblings. Mothers some times leave their young in crèches with other cows while they go off to feed.



A male hippo is called a bull, a female a cow and a baby a calf. Female hippos usually live in groups within a certain area, led by a dominant male. There are a number of collective nouns for a group of hippopotamus: school, crash, bloat, herd, pod, dale or siege.

FACT FILE:

Length: 3.5 - 4m

Height: 1.6m

Weight: Up to 3.2 tonnes

Colour: Greyish-brown.

Diet: Grass, but also some small animals.

Habitat: Grasslands near a water source.

Location: Native to Africa, south of the Sahara Desert.

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