

The Hippo



Hippos defecate in the water. Their dung provides essential basic elements for the food chain. Tiny microorganisms feed on it and then larger animals feed on those organisms. On land, hippos' large bodies make trails through vegetation that other animals may use for easy access to water holes. Because hippos' favorite food is short grass, they keep these grasses well trimmed which may help to deter grassfires. Hippos are an important part of the African ecosystem.

Hippopotamuses love water, which is why the Greeks named them the "river horse." Hippos spend up to 16 hours a day submerged in rivers and lakes to keep their massive bodies cool under the hot African sun. Hippos are graceful in water, good swimmers, and can hold their breath underwater for up to five minutes. However, they are often large enough to simply walk or stand on the lake floor, or lie in the shallows. Their eyes and nostrils are located high on their heads, which allows them to see and breathe while mostly submerged.

Hippos also bask on the shoreline and secrete an oily red substance, which gave rise to the myth that they sweat blood. The liquid is actually a skin moisturizer and sunblock that may also provide protection against germs.

At sunset, hippopotamuses leave the water and travel overland to graze. They may travel 6 miles (10 kilometers) in a night, along single-file pathways, to consume some 80 pounds (35 kilograms) of grass. Considering their enormous size, a hippo's food intake is relatively low. If threatened on land hippos may run for the water—they can match a human's speed for short distances.

<http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/animalia/eumetazoa/coelomates/deuterostomes/chordata/craniata/mammalia/artiodactyla/hippopotamus.htm#ff2>

- DESCRIPTION:** Huge gray bulky body with a large head. Its facial features somewhat resemble those of a pig.
- SIZE:** 3.96-4.57 m. (13-15 ft.) long; 1.52 m. (5 ft.) high at the shoulder
- WEIGHT:** 1,800-3,600 kg (4,000-8,000 lb.)
- DIET:** Herbivores, prefer short grasses of the African plains
- GESTATION:** 8 months
- SEXUAL MATURITY:**
- MALE At 7 yrs.
- FEMALE At 9 yrs.
- LIFE SPAN:** 20-40 years; 50 years in captivity
- RANGE:** West and East Central Africa; extinct in northern and southern parts of original range
- HABITAT:** Rivers and lakes in grasslands; found mainly in large populations on preserves

FAST FACTS

Hippos are excellent swimmers and can hold their breath for about five minutes. They can even walk along the bottoms of rivers and lakes.

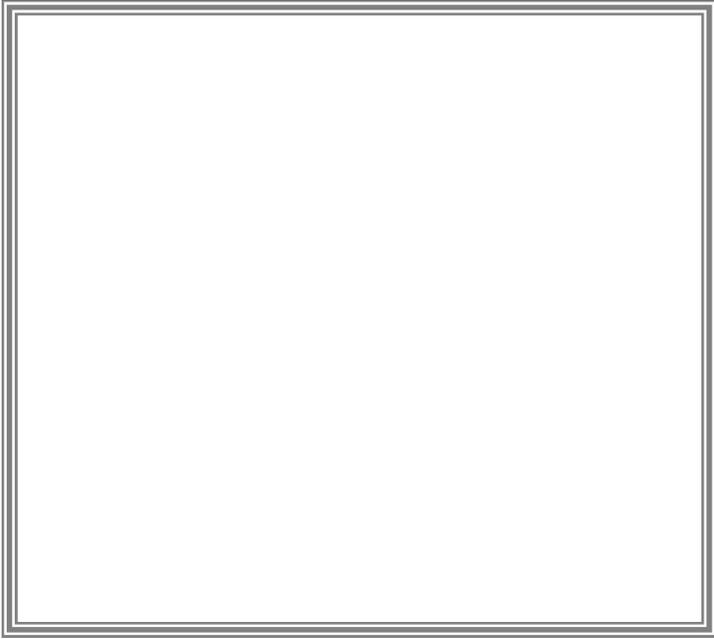
Hippos were once thought to sweat blood. Actually, hippos secrete a pinkish colored oil that helps them keep their skin moist in the hot African climate.

Hippos spend most of their days in the water or wallowing in the mud, generally coming up on land to feed at night.

Hippos are efficient grazers - their lips are almost 70 cm. or about two feet wide!



Picture: <http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/animalia/eumetazoa/coelomates/deuterostomes/chordata/craniata/mammalia/artiodactyla/hippopotamus.htm#ff2>



Handwriting practice lines consisting of eight horizontal lines, each with a dashed midline.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of twelve horizontal lines, each with a dashed midline.

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