



Zebra (Grevy's)

Grevy's Zebra:

Equus grevyi



Distribution:

northern Kenya, Somalia and eastern Ethiopia.

Habitat:

dry savanna country.

Description:

horse-like with big, broad, rounded ears. Long, narrow head, very narrow & numerous stripes on body and legs. Belly is usually pure white.

Size:

length : 2.1-2.3m, tail 50cm. Shoulder height : 1.5m.

Weight:

350-430kg.

Life span:

25-30 years.

Food:

grasses and some foliage.

Grevy's zebra is the largest of all the zebras and it is an endangered species. Grevy was not the discoverer of this species, but a President of France who received the first specimens known to the scientific world.

It is widely believed and accepted that this zebra was the famed "hippotigris" (horse-tiger) of the Roman circus, so the specimens so graciously received by President Grevy may have been new to science, but they had been known by much earlier Europeans.

At first glance all zebra species look very similar to one another, but Grevy's zebra is probably the most easily recognised of them all. It is a very striking, tall zebra with huge ears and narrow stripes which encircle the rump in a concave pattern.

Territory:

These zebras usually live in small herds of up to fourteen individuals. There are family groups as well as bachelor herds, but the biggest and strongest stallions are solitary for much of the time, each occupying a territory of about one mile in diameter.

Feeding:

Like all horses, the Grevy's zebra eats mainly grass and spends most of the daylight hours grazing. It prefers tender shoots, but usually has to eat mostly coarser grass. Leaves, bark, buds and fruit are also eaten.

Grevy's zebra has adapted well to its desert-like habitat and seems able to withstand extremes of both heat and thirst. It can survive for several days without eating or drinking.

Breeding:

Normally only one foal is born to a female after a gestation period (the time between mating and birth) of thirteen months. Most of the babies are born between May and August. The young zebra has brown stripes

and a mane which stretches from the shoulder to the tail.

The background colour of the foal's coat is light brown instead of white. This protective colouring helps the foal to "freeze" and blend instantly with its background.

The foal can stand on its feet within one hour of its birth and can run with the herd after only a few hours - this gives it a much better chance of escaping from predators, usually lions. Young males leave the herd when they are about two years old and join bachelor herds. Eventually they will collect mares to form their own new herds or perhaps challenge old or weak stallions and take over their herd.

Grevy's Zebra and Man

Several years ago there was a great increase in poaching, particularly in northern Kenya, and there was a great demand for the narrow-striped skin of the Grevy's zebra for the manufacture of handbags, purses, slippers, rugs, wall-drapes - and even clothing. This resulted in the sharp and sudden decline of the species. Since Kenya banned all hunting, and the export of zebra skin products, the poaching has largely stopped, but numbers have not yet recovered sufficiently for the Grevy's zebra to be removed from the official list of endangered species.

Other Zebras

There are three species of zebra, one of which is the Grevy's (*Equus grevyi*). The other two are the common zebra (*Equus burchelli*) and the mountain zebra (*Equus zebra*). The common zebra is widely distributed throughout southern and eastern Africa, south of the Sahara. This species displays differences in markings because of its wide distribution and this once resulted in the assumption that there were a great many different species of zebra in Africa. Today it is generally accepted that there are four races of common zebra. These are Grant's zebra (*Equus burchelli boehmi*), Chapman's zebra (*Equus burchelli antiquorum*), Selous' zebra (*Equus burchelli borensis*) and the true Burchell's zebra (*Equus burchelli burchelli*), which is now an

extinct race.

Two subspecies of mountain zebra are recognized, living in southern Africa. These are Hartmann's zebra (*Equus zebra hartmannae*) and the Cape mountain zebra (*Equus zebra zebra*) which is endangered-in 1937 this subspecies was reduced to only 45 individuals as a result of relentless hunting by farmers. The 45 animals were given protection in a national park in South Africa and their numbers have now increased to about 500.

The Quagga - A lost species of Zebra

150 years ago a fourth species of zebra, the quagga (*Equus quagga*), was extremely common in South Africa. It most closely resembled the common zebra but had distinct brown and off-white stripes on its head and neck only. Along its flanks the stripes gradually faded out to a plain brown. The legs and belly were white.

The early white settlers, the Boer farmers, shot large numbers of quaggas as food for their servants. They used to take a train of wagons out onto the plains and blast away at anything that moved! Then many of the carcasses would be loaded onto the wagons and the rest of the dead and dying animals were left to rot. This process was repeated all over the quagga's range and by 1820 (around 70 years after the first settlers arrived) their numbers were severely depleted. Finally, the last wild ones were killed in 1861. The zoos were surprised to learn that there were no more replacements for their dead quaggas, and when the last captive ones died, the quagga was completely extinct.

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