



Hippos

Scientific Name: Hippopotamus amphibious.

Home: The rivers, lakes, swamps, and wallows of Africa.

Description: Barrel-shaped, blue-grey body with pink belly, large head, stumpy legs.



J Knocker 2003

A fully grown hippo (is it a cow?...or a dinosaur?...) walking on the banks of the Zambezi River, Zambia.

Hippo facts

Hippos have lived in Africa for thousands of years. They are social creatures preferring to live in larger groups or “Pods” where they establish a hierarchy based on male dominance.

They are never far from water! When they venture out of a river or lake you might think you were looking at a very large cow. Here are some other interesting facts about hippos:

- The Hippopotamus, whose name means "river horse", is a plant-eating water-loving giant.
- A relative of camels, pigs, and deer, the hippo has two lives in one! The centre of a hippo's day life is water. Like a hippo pool-party, sometimes hundreds of hippos, will share a territory of water during the day. Whether it's mating, playing, fighting or giving birth, hippos are nearly always wet.
- The hippo's night life begins a few hours after sunset, when all the hippos file out of the water to graze on land by the light of the moon. They wander up to 10 kms from water and can eat as much as 45kgs of vegetation every night!
- Hippos have huge mouths and teeth, even though they eat grass. A bull hippo's canines can grow to 28 inches long, and their mouths can open four feet wide!
- Hippo-Talk? Hippos make a of variety grunts, growls, screams and other sounds underwater to communicate with each other!



Did you know ?...

Hippos have glands that secrete a pink liquid on their skin that acts like sun screen in the African heat and as well as an anti-septic against cuts and scrapes.

My Hippo Adventures

Malawi

Hippo's live in most African countries that I have visited. I was once travelling a long a river in a motor boat in Malawi. It was sunset and we were moving slowly when suddenly there was an enormous crash alongside the boat. A hippo rammed the boat, probably because we had disturbed its afternoon sleep. It was like hitting a rock in the river; luckily the boat didn't sink!

We looked at the hippo and he looked back, before slipping underwater again to continue his sleep. It was a scary moment for me and my friends in the boat!

Zambia

Hazel and I were staying at Sausage Tree Camp in the Lower Zambezi National Park in Zambia. The Zambezi River is very wide, but also has narrow lagoons and estuaries which are fun to explore in as boat or canoe.

Neither of us had been in a canoe on any river, let alone one of Africa's largest! We set off from the camp and paddled down to a lagoon. The river got narrower and narrower. Ahead of us we could see a pod (group) of hippos in the river (see the picture below).



Our little canoes got closer and closer and the hippos continued to watch us before disappearing below the water. There just didn't seem to be anywhere for us to pass—they were stretched between the river banks!

Our guide kept saying that everything would be OK. I was thinking to myself that I might have to swim

to the bank if the hippo's attacked our canoes. And there would be more hippos and some crocodiles watching me swim, probably licking their lips at the thought!

Nevertheless, our canoes got right up to the hippos and instead of them going mad and knocking us over they disappeared below the river surface and let us pass! We were very relieved and had a happy time watching elephants swimming, buffalo and crocodiles all on the river banks.

Tanzania

In Northern Tanzania we visited the famous Ngorongoro Crater. This is part of a large conservation area where wildlife live alongside people who exist as farmers.

The crater was formed millions of years ago when a volcano collapsed leaving a large hole in the ground which is between 16 and 19 kms across. The bottom of the crater is full of numerous animals; lions, elephants, zebras, rhinoceros and plenty of wildebeest.

There are also hippos that live in the freshwater pools on the crater bed. And these hippos seem very laid back. They know that there are lots of tourists visiting the crater each day and over the years have developed a few party tricks to keep people entertained!

One of their tricks can be seen in the picture. It shows the very pink and spotty tummy of a hippo that has just performed a somersault in the water! Each of the 20 hippos we saw in the pool decided at some stage to show us a few somersaults.



We watched these tricks for half an hour and still find it amazing to think about. Perhaps they were trying to scratch their backs on the bottom? Who knows but it was very funny to watch!