

Name _____



The Mighty Hippopotamus

The hippopotamus, often called a "hippo," is one of the largest land animals on Earth. Its name comes from the Greek words "hippos," meaning horse, and "potamos," meaning river. Even though its name means "river horse," a hippo is not related to horses. Hippos are more closely related to whales and dolphins!

Hippos live in Africa, mostly in countries with rivers and lakes. They spend much of their time in the water to stay cool. Their thick, grayish skin can easily dry out and crack if they stay in the sun too long. Water keeps their skin safe and helps them stay comfortable in hot weather.

Hippos are huge! They can grow up to 16 feet long and weigh as much as 9,000 pounds. That is about the same weight as a small car! Despite their size, hippos can run very fast, reaching speeds of up to 20 miles per hour on land. In the water, they are graceful swimmers, using their webbed feet to move easily.

Hippos are herbivores, which means they only eat plants. They mostly graze on grass at night when it is cooler. A single hippo can eat over 80 pounds of grass in one night. Even though they have large teeth, these teeth are not used for eating. Hippos use their sharp tusks for defense and fighting other hippos when protecting their territory.

Hippos are social animals and live in groups called pods. A pod can have 10 to 30 hippos, with one dominant male leading the group. The leader protects the pod from threats. Female hippos, called cows, take care of their young, called calves. Baby hippos stay close to their mothers for protection and care.

Hippos may look calm and peaceful, but they are actually very dangerous. They are one of the most aggressive animals in Africa. Hippos can be protective of their space and can charge at anything they see as a threat, including boats and other animals.

Today, hippos face challenges in the wild. Habitat loss and poaching threaten their populations. Conservation efforts are important to keep these amazing creatures safe for the future.