

White-Bearded Wildebeest

- White-Bearded Wildebeests live an average of 20 years.
- The wildebeest, also known as the gnu, is a large antelope measuring between 45 and 55 inches at the shoulder and weighing between 350 and 600 pounds.
- Wildebeests measure between 5 and 8 feet in length and have a tail length of 14 to 22 inches.
- When the Dutch settled in South Africa, they named this animal “wildebeest,” meaning “wild beast,” due to its untamed appearance and vigorous nature.
- Wildebeests have a long, rectangular-shaped head.
- They have a wider row of front teeth, or incisors.
- Both males and females possess lengthy horns that spring outward from the base of their head and form curved semicircles, pointing slightly backward.
- In adult **males**, the horns are **heavily embossed**.
- All wildebeests have short hair covering their bodies, with black vertical stripes of longer hair on their back.
- The body of a wildebeest appears disproportionate, with a hefty front, slim hindquarters, and spindly legs.
- **Herds are noisy and make frequent grunting type noises.**
- Wildebeest are highly desirable prey for spotted hyenas and lions – also cheetahs and wild dogs. Their main form of protection is gathering in large herds.
- Each year, about 1,500,000 wildebeest in the Serengeti-Mara travel in a migratory circle of 500 to 1,000 miles – called “**The Great Migration**.” The migration begins in the southeastern Serengeti in late April or May. (*Once grass flowers and sets seed, it loses the succulent green leaves the wildebeest prefer.*)
- Their pace is driven by rain (*smell along with lightning/thunder*) and the nutrition of the grass.
- Migrating presents many dangers especially when crossing the Mara river - from crocodiles, exhaustion, and being trampled. About 250,000 wildebeest are killed during this migration season. However, their bodies serve many animals along the river for years.
- They tend to migrate in lengthy, single-file columns, traversing long distances at an easy rocking gallop, though they are swift when provoked.
- Animals such as Thomson’s gazelle, zebra, and even predators will follow the traveling wildebeest.
- Wildebeests are strictly grazers, preferring sweet, stocky, short grasses.
- They begin grazing soon after sunrise, rest briefly at midday, and continue feeding until sunset.
- Wildebeest need water almost daily. They are constantly on the move for water and grasses they prefer.
- **Wildebeest are sociable**, territorial animals.
- Females and their young form small herds, their territories frequently overlapping.
- After about a year, males will leave their herd and enter into a bachelor herd. At 4 or 5 years old, males will become highly territorial and depart from the bachelor herd.
- Cow and calf herds typically remain constant; however, when there are many groups clustered close together in an area, cows will often leave their group for another.
- The beginning of the mating season, called the rut, is connected to the full moon. Breeding clusters of around 150 wildebeest form from within the bigger herds. In these groupings, five or six of the most dominant bulls create and guard territories. Bulls make a show of bucking and cantering around their lands.

- June starts rutting season. Neighboring bulls challenge one another at territory edges. They follow a series of ritualized actions: bucking, snorting, pawing at the ground, fighting, and grunting in a deep croaking manner like a frog. The wildebeests face one another on their knees, foreheads to the ground, ready for combat. The bulls move forward to strike each other, knocking heads and horns, but rarely being injured.
- Bulls also mark their territories by urinating, defecating and spreading secretions in particular areas. The secretions come from the interdigital and preorbital glands, spread when bulls paw at the ground and proceed to rub it with their heads.
- Female wildebeest give birth to one calf in the center of the herd. Astoundingly, around 85 percent of females in a herd give birth within the same two to three weeks.
- Once a calf is delivered, the mother begins to lick it. In 3-6 minutes, the calf is able to stand on its feet.
- Around 500,000 calves are born in those few weeks in February.
- Mother and calf remain together for a full year and are able to recognize each other's calls.
- Wildebeest are little bothered by the presence of predators unless the predator is actually hunting. If a lion or wild dog is in view, they raise their heads and make an alarm snort. As long as the predator is in full view and is not moving rapidly nor approaching, they pay little further attention besides keeping a wary eye out while grazing.

Find wildebeest pictures and info about other animals in this play at: www.theater4church.com/Animals.htm

