

## Plains Zebra

- The average life span of the Plains zebra is 20 – 25 years in the wild.
- 3 species of Zebras: **1.** Grévy's Zebra **2.** Mountain Zebra **3.** Plains Zebra - subspecies: Grant (*In Serengeti*)
- Plains Zebra are medium sized and thick-bodied with relatively short legs. Both male and females stand about 4.6 feet high at the shoulder, and are approximately 8 feet long.
- Their average weight is about 550 pounds. However, males may weigh 10% more than females.
- Zebras, like all members of the horse family, are ungulates (*a mammal having hooves*) with odd toes. They walk on tiptoe on a single central toe. The hoof (*an enlarged toenail*) protects this single toe.
- Like horses, zebras have four gaits: walk, trot, canter and gallop.
- The **stripes** on a Plains zebra's neck **continue onto its mane**, which has stiff, erect hairs.
- Plains Zebra are boldly striped in darkest brown (*looks black from a distance*) and white. No two individuals look exactly alike. All have vertical stripes on the forepart of the body, which travel towards the horizontal stripes on their hindquarters.
- In addition to keeping zebras cool (*shininess reflects 70% of solar radiation*), a zebra's stripes also serve to help camouflage the animal in long grass, and distract predators – because lions are color blind, and a herd of stripy running zebras is very confusing if you see everything in black and white.
- Research shows that a **zebra's stripes keep biting insects such as tsetse flies at bay** – the monochrome pattern seems to throw off the visual systems of flies because they don't see a Zebra as one animal until very close. (*Striped blankets can be purchased here in US for horses to help keep away horseflies.*)
- From a young age, zebras have excellent senses. **They have superb, color vision and acute sense of smell and hearing** which helps them detect predators early. They're extremely sensitive to smoke. They also have an excellent sense of taste in which they can detect slight changes of their food quality.
- These herbivores graze 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of the day on grass and sometimes bark, roots, stems, leaves and twigs.
- These ungulates eat the top of the grass which other grazers are not able to digest. Thus, they're called "pioneer grazers" who do advance grazing, preparing plains for more picky grazers (*like gazelle*) that consume short grasses, rich with nutrients. Yet, Zebras also like short grasses and are particularly fond of freshly sprouted grass on recently burnt ground.
- Their teeth are well adapted for grazing, with sharp incisors at the front of their mouth to bite the grass, and large molars at the back for crushing and grinding. The chewing and grinding wears their teeth down, but teeth grow their entire lives.
- Zebras must drink water daily because the top of the grass doesn't hold water like leaves.
- In Serengeti there are two seasons, wet and dry. Zebras rely on rainfall for food and water. Thus, they have to go on great migrations to follow the rains. The zebra will migrate up to 700 miles for food.
- Plains Zebras live in harems of up to six breeding females and their young (*foals*), with a dominant male – **the devoted stallion**. He walks last in the group. Each female has a place in the hierarchy.
- Different families will come together in huge herds of hundreds of zebras.
- Once mares are able to fend for themselves, male offspring are evicted from the herd by their father.
- **A dazzle of zebras** is the most common collective noun, named for the motion dazzle effect created by a group of running zebras. A group of zebras can also be called a **herd** or a **zeal**.
- These groups are so close that if a predator injures one individual, fellow members will circle it and attempt to scare the intruder away with their teeth and hooves.

- Herds will mingle with wildebeests, gazelles, giraffes, ostriches and antelope while they graze and even come to depend on them as additional protection against predators.
- **Zebras are always busy, alert and very noisy.** Plains Zebra make a range of noises. **They are known for panic and highly stressed reactions** to tense situations.
- Plains Zebra communicate with each other. Mares produce a 'whiney' sound when separated from foals and 'nicker' to warn of danger. **The zebra alarm is a 'yelping bark'** made as they escape predators.
- Like horses, zebras will snort when excited and nicker (*creating a 'whuffle' kind of sound by blowing air through their nose and lips*) when greeting each other.
- Along with vocalizations, these zebras communicate through facial expressions. For example, greeting ritual includes raising their ears and pushing their face forward. When feeling danger, they usually drop their ears, pressing them against the head.
- Neck outstretched – Greeting; Ears forward – Frightened; Ears erect – Alert or Friendly; Snort – Tense;
- Zebras **strengthen their social bonds with grooming**. Members of a harem nip and scrape along the neck, shoulders and back with their teeth and lips. Mothers and foals groom the most often followed by siblings. Grooming shows social status and eases aggressive behavior.
- Foals can run with the herd within a few hours of birth. The average infant mortality is about 50%, mostly due to predation by lions and spotted hyena.
- The main predators are lions and spotted hyenas. Nile crocodiles are also great threats during river crossings. Wild dogs, cheetahs and leopards also prey on zebra – mainly the young.
- For protection from land predators, Zebras retreat into open areas with good visibility at night time. They are highly maneuverable and often able to outrun predators – reaching speeds of up to 40 mph. If that doesn't work, **their powerful backwards kick, given in self-defense, can break a lion's jaw.**
- Plains Zebras are usually seen sleeping while standing up when in the safety of a group. Pairs will rest their heads on each other's backs. They stand so that if a predator suddenly comes, they can quickly run away. So, if there appears to be no danger, Zebras can sleep lying down.
- Zebras should never be domesticated like horses. Their backs lack the strength and the only way to train zebras is through cruel and inhumane treatment.
- The **oxpecker** perches on the backs of zebras. He eats pesky ticks, flies and other bugs and washes the bugs down with a healthy helping of blood. Ouch.
- Find more zebra pictures and info about the other animals at: [www.theater4church/Animals.htm](http://www.theater4church/Animals.htm)

