

Giraffes

Giraffes – Grassland Giants with a Kick!

INTRODUCTION

Any visit to the zoo would not be complete without looking in on the giraffe enclosure. These fascinating creatures have always attracted visitors, who adore their graceful figures, dreamy eyes and beautiful fur patterns. But what are giraffes really like in the wild? Let's find out more.



CARING PARENTS

Giraffes are mammals, meaning they give birth to young that feed on their mother's milk. The female gives birth to her calf standing up – but this six-foot baby can walk just one hour after being born. Initially, it will take milk but as little as a week later, the calf will start to eat vegetation.

Giraffes are caring, attentive parents, protecting their young from predators in the savanna grasslands (mostly wild dogs or lions). A single kick from an aggravated giraffe can be fatal – or at least ward off any further attacks. Despite their spindly legs and innocent-looking faces, giraffes can be highly dangerous when provoked.

During the course of a day, a giraffe will take regular naps of between 5 and 30 minutes, sleeping while standing. This enables them to stay vigilant – an important factor in the survival of their vulnerable young.

ORANGE GIANTS!

Giraffes – which are the tallest land animals on Earth – can bound along at more than 35 miles per hour if they need to. Standing at over 14 feet on their elegant six-foot legs, they are three times taller than the average human. Their long necks and bodies are mottled with a patchwork of orange – each giraffe's pattern is unique, just like a human fingerprint. Male giraffes have a habit of using their necks to fight other males. This is called 'necking'. Giraffes also have two-three horns on their heads called ossicones. Zookeepers have discovered that giraffes are very sensitive to being touched there and will respond aggressively if this happens.

In spite of their long necks, giraffes struggle to reach down to drink water and can sadly become stuck if they crouch too low. These magnificent creatures feed upon rubbery acacia leaves, which provide most of their water – they only take fresh drinking water once every few days, if they can find it. However, this does mean that they need to eat a great deal of leaves and will consume as much as 45kg of vegetation every day. Acacia shrubs are inedible to most animals: they have an unpleasant taste and large, deadly thorns. A giraffe's long and versatile tongue (which is able to grip at plants) is impervious to any damage these spines may cause – they don't feel a thing! Like cows, they regurgitate their food to grind it over again (called chewing the cud) – they have four stomachs!

CONCLUSION

Most first impressions of seeing a giraffe in a zoo or wildlife park are of them quietly moving about their space, slow and steady creatures that mind their own business while chewing away. This impression changes quickly when you see them in the wild – running, kicking out or fighting with their muscly necks. Giraffes are unique, fascinating animals, but their gentle lifestyle in zoos means that we do not really see the true power of this magnificent grassland giant.

Giraffes

Questions about the text: Giraffes – Grassland Giants with a Kick!

1. What impression of giraffes does the introduction give the reader?

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2. What makes a giraffe a mammal?

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3. Which phrase in the fourth paragraph suggests that giraffe parents keep a look out for predators?

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4. Which two words in the third paragraph can mean upset or angry?

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5. What is the main advantage of giraffes only needing to sleep for short periods of time?

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6. At the start of the fifth paragraph, why does the author use the words 'if they need to' when talking about giraffes running at full speed?

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7. Why does the report compare giraffes to humans or cows?

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8. The text says: 'they only take fresh drinking water once every few days, if they can find it'. What does this suggest about the savanna where the giraffes live?

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9. Which word in the sixth paragraph means 'not easily affected'?

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10. By the end of the report, how has your impression of giraffes changed? Explore two of these changes. Use the text to support your view.

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