

Okapis

Okapis are mammals native to central Africa. They have striped hindquarters and forelegs like a zebra's and a head that resembles a giraffe's. Okapis are related to giraffes. They have large, upright ears that allow them to hear the slightest sound so they can stay away from danger. In fact, okapis are so good at staying away from danger that they are rarely spotted in the wild. Scientists did not even know they existed until 1900!

Okapis have oily fur that allows the moisture and rain in their natural habitat to slide easily off of their hides so they can keep dry. Male okapis have short horns that are covered with skin. Though their stripes stand out when we see them in zoos, the okapi's natural habitat is a dense rain forest with sunlight that filters only partly through the trees. Because of this, okapis' stripes help to camouflage them.

Although okapis are related to giraffes, they are not nearly as tall. This is helpful for them because in the rain forests where they live, the trees have branches that hang to the ground and there are roots and tree trunks everywhere. Okapis have short necks and legs to make it easier for them to move around in the rainforest and avoid getting tangled in branches. These animals are ruminants, like cows. They eat anywhere from 40 to 65 pounds of twigs, leaves and fruits every day and always chew their food twice! These animals are most active in the late afternoon and early evening.

Okapis are solitary animals and often travel alone to search for food. The exception is females who sometimes travel with their babies, known as calves. Calves can stand up within a half hour of being born and are able to nurse within an hour. However, they don't poop for the first time until they are four to eight weeks old! This helps to keep them safe from predators who might find them by scent before they have had a chance to gain strength and size. In the meantime, females hide them in a safe place, returning from time to time to feed them.

Okapis are territorial and do their best to keep other okapis out of their space. This is especially true among males. Males will not allow other males in their territories, but they are usually accepting of females. Okapis use scent glands to mark territory and can tell by checking the ground whether they are in another animal's space.

Okapis Questions

1. Okapis are
 - a. a cross between zebras and giraffes.
 - b. related to giraffes but not zebras.
 - c. related to zebras but not giraffes.
 - d. a type of deer.

2. Which of its senses helps the okapi stay out of trouble?
 - a. its sense of hearing
 - b. its sense of sight
 - c. its sense of camouflage
 - d. its sense of smell

3. Okapis are
 - a. taller than giraffes.
 - b. not as tall as giraffes.
 - c. about the same size as giraffes.
 - d. about the same size as zebras.

4. Okapis blend into the rainforest environment because of their
 - a. dull coloring.
 - b. quiet nature.
 - c. stripes.
 - d. All of the above

5. Okapis are
 - a. ruminants.
 - b. herbivores.
 - c. vegetarians.
 - d. All of the above

6. An okapi can eat between _____ and _____ pounds of food a day.

Okapis Questions (Cont'd)

7. Baby okapis are called
 - a. pups
 - b. calves
 - c. joeys
 - d. fawns

8. Female okapis
 - a. carry babies around on their backs.
 - b. do not care for their young.
 - c. hide their young in a safe place and return to feed them.
 - d. never travel with their young.

9. In order to keep predators from finding them, baby okapis
 - a. hide in caves dug by their mothers.
 - b. do not poop until they are 4 to 8 weeks old.
 - c. are born without scent glands.
 - d. All of the above

10. Okapis
 - a. are very social animals.
 - b. live in packs.
 - c. live in dens.
 - d. are territorial.

Name _____



Date _____

Okapis Answers

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. d
6. 40 and 65
7. b
8. c
9. b
10. d