

HIPPOPOTAMUS, PYGMY

RANGE:

Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea in Africa.

HABITAT:

Moist forests and wetlands along lakeshores and rivers.

SIZE:

5 feet in length, 2^{1/2} – 3^{1/2} feet in height, and 400 – 600 pounds.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

30 - 45 years in captivity.

REPRODUCTION:

Gestation period is 184 – 204 days. Females give birth to one calf and on rare occasions twins. The calves are usually born in shallow water and weigh from 8 – 14 pounds at birth.

DIET:

Herbivorous.

Wild: A variety of fruits, aquatic vegetation, twigs, grasses and leaves.

Zoos: Grain, a variety of produce and timothy hay.

BEHAVIOR:

Pygmy hippos are secretive and little is known about their social structure. They usually travel singly, in pairs or in triads made up of male, female and calf. They spend the day hiding and sleeping in forest underbrush. Their main predators are leopards. At night they travel through the forests and swamps in search of food. Their territorial marking includes spreading their dung by swishing their tails back and forth as they defecate. These piles can exceed three feet in height.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

Hippopotamus is a Greek term meaning "river horse."

There are two species of hippopotamus – the Nile River hippo (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) and the Pygmy hippo (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis*). Both species secrete a protective mucous through their skin to keep it from drying out in the hot rays of the equatorial sun.

Pygmies have proportionately longer legs with clawed toes rather than webbing and their eyes and nostrils face more to the side than their aquatic cousins. Their mouths and teeth are exaggerated in size. A large male Pygmy hippo can have canines reaching eight inches in length and weighing two pounds collectively. They use these massive teeth to defend themselves and protect their territories. Wide, tough lips also help hippos graze larger areas.

STATUS:

Due to habitat fragmentation and illegal poaching for bushmeat and traditional medicines the pygmy hippopotamus is considered vulnerable and in decline. They are listed on CITES Appendix II. Numbers in the wild are estimated at less than ten thousand.

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photo by Pam Spaulding

Order:	Artiodactyla
Family:	Hippopotamidae
Genus:	Hexaprotodon
Species:	liberiensis

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