

Endangered Species: The okapi

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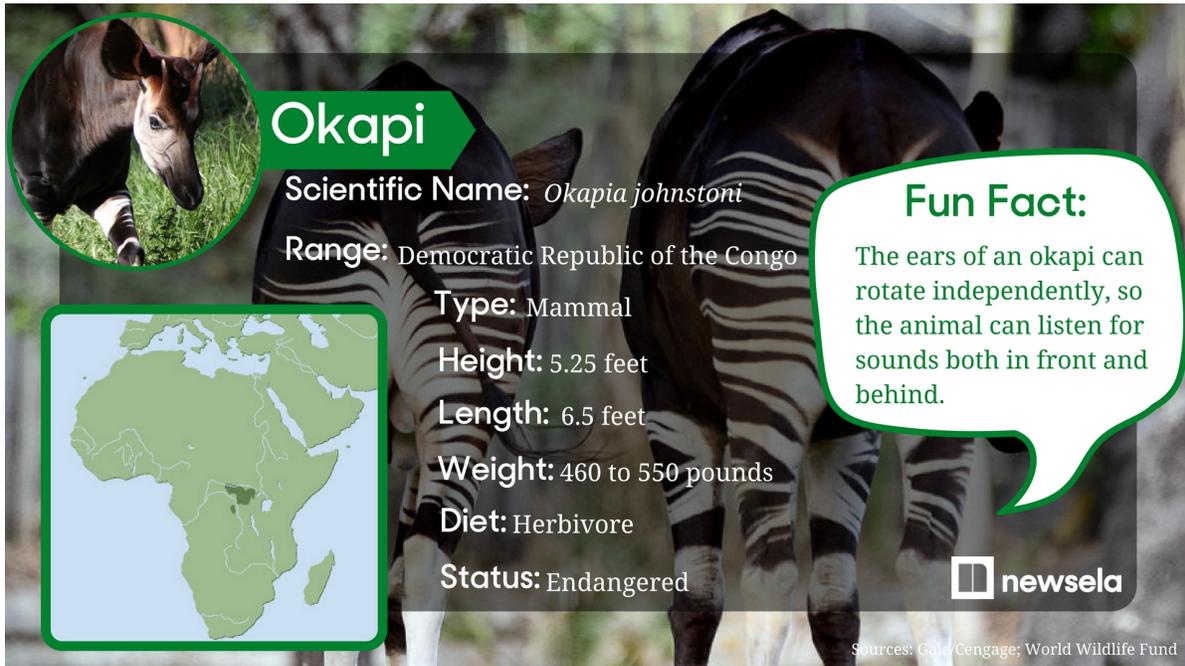


Image 1: Okapi are unique. Although they are part of the giraffe family, they look a bit like deer and zebras, too. Photo from Wikimedia.

The only other member of the giraffe family, the okapi looks like a cross between a giraffe, a deer and a zebra. Its forehead, long neck, and body are chocolate brown. While its upper legs have horizontal white and black stripes, the lower legs are white with a black band near the hoof. The okapi has large, flexible ears and gray cheeks. Like a giraffe, it has a tongue that is long, black, and prehensile or adapted for grasping or holding, especially by wrapping around something. It uses its tongue to strip leaves from trees. Male okapis have short, hair-covered horns. The okapi's body is about 6.5 feet long, and the animal stands around 5.25 feet at the shoulder. It weighs between 460 and 550 pounds.

Okapis live in forests of tall trees. They eat more than 100 species of plants. They munch on leaves, grass, fruit and fungi. To get minerals, they eat river clay and charcoal from burned trees. This species is most active during the day. Okapis are solitary, coming together only to mate.

After a pregnancy period of 15 months, the female gives birth to a single calf. It is weaned or given solid food instead of the mother's milk at 6 months. At 3 years old it reaches its full size. In captivity, okapis can live for 33 years.



The infographic features a background image of an okapi. On the left, there is a circular inset showing a close-up of an okapi's head. Below that is a map of Africa with the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlighted in green. To the right of the map, a list of facts is presented in white text on a dark background. A speech bubble on the right contains a 'Fun Fact' in green text. The Newsela logo is in the bottom right corner, and sources are listed at the very bottom.

Okapi

Scientific Name: *Okapia johnstoni*

Range: Democratic Republic of the Congo

Type: Mammal

Height: 5.25 feet

Length: 6.5 feet

Weight: 460 to 550 pounds

Diet: Herbivore

Status: Endangered

Fun Fact: The ears of an okapi can rotate independently, so the animal can listen for sounds both in front and behind.

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Sources: Gale Cengage, World Wildlife Fund

Habitat And Population

Okapis live only in the central and northeastern rain forest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). DRC is a country in central Africa. Scientists do not know the total population size. They estimate that 35,000 to 50,000 okapis remain, but many believe the number is much lower.

History And Conservation

For centuries, native African peoples told of a shy creature living in the rainforest. Its camouflage made the animal almost impossible to find. Explorers from Europe were curious about the secretive creature. They called it the African unicorn. In the 1900s, the British explorer Harry Johnston obtained skin and skulls of the animal and sent them to England, where biologists identified the animal as a member of the giraffe family.

The okapi has been a protected species in the DRC since 1933. It appears on the country's money. But, from 1995 to 2013, its population decreased by more than 50 percent. Deforestation or the large-scale removal of trees and human settlement pose the greatest threats to the okapi. Since 1996, the DRC has suffered through two civil wars that killed millions of people. The

country is still unstable as well as desperately poor. Armed soldiers have settled in protected rainforests where okapis live. They farm and log illegally and hunt the okapi and other endangered animals for food. In 2012, soldiers opened fire on the headquarters of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, killing six people and 14 okapis.



Both African and international conservation groups are planning strategies to protect the okapi. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) listed the species as endangered in 2013 and formed the IUCN Giraffe and Okapi Specialist Group to develop a conservation strategy. Protecting okapi within the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and another large national park in the DRC is the most important objective. One group, the Okapi Conservation Project, supports the members of the government who patrol the wildlife reserve and educates people living near the reserve about forest conservation. Conservationists are people who work to manage and protect nature. They believe that raising worldwide awareness about okapis — and raising funds for protection efforts — is essential for this species' survival.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The okapi's body is about 6.5 feet long, and the animal stands around 5.25 feet at the shoulder.
 - (B) For centuries, native African peoples told of a shy creature living in the rain forest.
 - (C) Deforestation or the large-scale removal of trees and human settlement pose the greatest threats to the okapi.
 - (D) In 2012, soldiers opened fire on the headquarters of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, killing 6 people and 14 okapis.

- 2 Read the following detail from the article.

Protecting okapi within the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and another large national park in the DRC is the most important objective. One group, the Okapi Conservation Project, supports the members of the government who patrol the wildlife reserve and educates people living near the reserve about forest conservation. Conservationists are people who work to manage and protect nature. They believe that raising worldwide awareness about okapis — and raising funds for protection efforts — is essential for this species' survival.

How does this detail develop the central idea of the article?

- (A) It gives information about why the okapi has been losing land to deforestation.
- (B) It explains what groups are trying to save the okapi from dying out forever.
- (C) It shows that okapis are being hunted by soldiers who are living in their forests.
- (D) It illustrates why okapis can only be found in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- 3 Which selection from the article is BEST illustrated by Image 1 at the beginning of the article?
- (A) The only other member of the giraffe family, the okapi looks like a cross between a giraffe, a deer and a zebra. Its forehead, long neck, and body are chocolate brown. While its upper legs have horizontal white and black stripes, the lower legs are white with a black band near the hoof.
 - (B) Like a giraffe, it has a tongue that is long, black and prehensile, or adapted for grasping or holding, especially by wrapping around something. It uses its tongue to strip leaves from trees. Male okapis have short, hair-covered horns.
 - (C) They eat more than 100 species of plants. They munch on leaves, grass, fruit and fungi. To get minerals, they eat river clay and charcoal from burned trees. This species is most active during the day.
 - (D) After a pregnancy period of 15 months, the female gives birth to a single calf. It is weaned or given solid food instead of the mother's milk at 6 months. At 3 years old it reaches its full size. In captivity, okapis can live for 33 years.
- 4 How do Image 2 and information in the section "Habitat And Population" develop a coherent understanding of okapis?
- (A) They both give information about how readers can help okapis.
 - (B) They both explain why okapis have become endangered recently.
 - (C) They both illustrate that okapis mostly live in rain forest habitats.
 - (D) They both demonstrate where in the world okapis currently live.