

HOW ZEBRA GOT HIS STRIPES

Many, many, many moons ago, a large and vicious Baboon went to live along the verdant banks of the Mkuze river. He proclaimed all the land about him his own personal property, and added that only he had the right to use the sweet water of the river.

The other animals were troubled and resentful but no-one was brave enough or strong enough to dispute Baboon's decision.

No one, that is, but Zebra. Zebra, with his milky white coat, challenged Baboon to a duel, which Baboon accepted, declaring that the loser would be banished to a barren outcrop of rocks on the far side of the river.

The two animals fought, all afternoon and into the evening. Baboon's servants lit the fires of his encampment, and suddenly and unfairly, Baboon crashed into the weakening Zebra, sending him sprawling into the fire.

But! Instead of the flames proving to be Zebra's downfall, the added pain of the burning branches across his back gave him a sudden surge of power! With a shriek of anger and pain, Zebra kicked Baboon clean across the river! Baboon landed with such a thump amongst the barren boulders of the kopjie, that he skinned his behind and to this day carries the mark to remind him that all animals have the right to sweet drinking water.

Zebra too, did not come off unscathed. His milky coat carries the vivid stripes of the burning branches, almost as a talisman, reminding everyone of his bravery in his epic battle with Baboon!



FACTS ABOUT ZEBRAS

Species: Zebra (*Equus Quagga*)

Gregarious, in small herds of up to 40.

	Male	Female
Height	4 ft	4 ft
Weight	704 lb	616 lb
Weight at birth	66 lb	66 lb
Age at Weaning	11 months	11 months
Age at Maturity	3 years	3 years
Gestation Period		12 months
Number of Young		1
Lifespan	20 years	20 years

Identification: The zebra is very much like a horse or large pony covered in black-and-white stripes. It is the wild horse of Africa. Although the markings appear the same from a distance, in fact every single zebra's stripes are different.

Habitat: Lightly wooded and open grasslands near water.

Habits: The zebra is an animal which prefers to run in herds of its own kind, living in groups of up to 40. The male (called a stallion, like a horse) gathers his own group of females around him and fiercely guards them from rivals. Fights between stallions can be heard a long way off; they make fierce noises, barks, and high-pitched whinnies as they rear at each other, kicking and biting with murderous intent.

Sometimes zebras mix with herds of blue wildebeest. The two species eat different types of grass, so they do not compete for food. Both need plenty of water and will travel long distances to get it.

Zebras are one of the lion's favourite prey animals. Their defence is to kick out viciously with their hind hooves. Many a lion has faced a miserable death through starvation because its jawbone has been broken by such a well-aimed kick.

The zebra is a cousin of the horse and the donkey, and its hoof prints and droppings are similar. You might think that its bold black-and white stripes are the reverse of camouflage – as they are, close up. But at a distance, on the open plains when the heat shimmers up from the ground, the zebra's stripes seem to fade and blur until even a whole herd is almost invisible from a few miles away. The stripes can also be a means of confusing a predator as it moves in close to a running herd. Imagine trying to pick out any one particular zebra from a jumbled mass of moving black-and- white lines!

You will never see a thin-looking zebra because the body fat on a zebra is stored deeper inside the animal, not just under the skin. The only way to tell if a zebra is starving is when its mane starts to flop over to one side, because the one place where fat is stored near the surface is along the ridge of the neck.

Zoologists have found that zebras actually form close "friendships" with one or two animals in the herd, and these small groups of "friends" are always together.

Diet: Zebras are grazers, but in hard times when grass is scarce they will dig up roots with their front hooves and eat them.

Breeding: There is no particular breeding season. Foals are born singly and, amazingly, within a matter of hours from birth, can keep up with the rest of the herd.