

Global Interlink *Travel Services Ltd.*

P.O. Box 21600, No. 52 Grand Imperial Hotel Arcade, Kampala, Uganda.
Tel: 4235233; Fax: (256-41) 4231858. E-mail: global@global-interlink.org
www.global-interlink.org



Conservation update

FEATURE: GREVY'S ZEBRA - *Equus grevyi*

Fossils reveal that Grevy's zebras ranged at least to Egypt and perhaps beyond Africa until about 6,000 years ago. Historically they inhabited arid areas throughout the Horn of Africa – from Eritrea through Ethiopia, western Somalia, and into northern Kenya. They were able to survive in deserts if permanent water was available.

Unlike the plentiful plains zebras, the Grevy's zebra is endangered. In 1977, there were about 15,200 Grevy's zebra remaining in the Horn of Africa countries. Today, there are estimated to be fewer than 2300 left in the wild, and the species is considered extinct in Somalia. Its range is now severely limited to the northernmost scrublands in Kenya, and to three small isolated sub-populations in Ethiopia.

Until the mid-1970s, there was an international market for Grevy's zebra skins – considered to have fine and intricate patterns highly sought after for rugs, coats, and handbags. A 1977 hunting ban in Kenya and listing by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, combined to significantly reduce this trade. Since then, however, competition with domestic grazing animals, habitat destruction, and human disturbance at critical water holes have contributed to their further decline. During severe droughts, for example, pastoral peoples have blocked zebras' access to vital water holes, resulting in high mortality rates. In addition, while tourism generally has had a positive impact on Grevy's zebra conservation, poorly regulated ecotourism – especially when vehicles leave roads and disturb animals – may affect breeding in some parks. The Grevy's zebra was listed in 2000 as endangered on the World Conservation Union's (IUCN's) Red List of Threatened Animals.

OBSERVE THE WILDLIFE CODE AND DO YOUR PART TOWARDS HELPING US CONSERVE WILDLIFE...

- Respect the privacy of animals – minimum viewing distance is 20 metres.
- Remember that animals are wild and can be dangerous.
- Do not disturb the animals with sudden movements or loud noises.
- It is an offence to feed wild animals.
- Stay in your vehicle except at designated places.
- Respect the speed limit of 40 kilometres per hour in parks.
- Never drive off road as it degrades habitat.
- Do not leave litter or discard lighted cigarettes.
- Respect the culture of the people – never take photographs of local people without their permission.
- It is illegal to collect any living or dead item from a protected area.



Grevy's Zebra Facts

GREVY'S ZEBRA – *Equus Grevyi*

STATUS: Threatened

DESCRIPTION: Grevy's zebra is the largest living wild member of the horse family. They have narrow stripes that cover the head, body and legs. A Grevy's zebra's belly is white and does not have stripes.

SIZE: Grevy's zebras are 4.5 to 5 feet tall at the shoulder. They are 8 to 10 feet long and weigh between 350 to 450 kg.

LIFESPAN: Grevy's zebras can live up to 22 years.

RANGE: Northern Kenya, Southern Ethiopia

HABITAT: Grevy's zebras live in grasslands and semi-arid scrub.

FOOD: Grevy's zebras eat tough grass that many other species are unable to eat.

BEHAVIOUR: Unlike other zebra species, Grevy's zebras do not develop lasting bonds with other adults. Some males are solitary and territorial. Unorganized groups of nursing mothers and their foals and bachelor male groups may develop as well. Some individuals may migrate seasonally if environmental conditions require them to do so.

OFFSPRING: Zebras breed throughout the year. In areas where zebras migrate, mating occurs in July through August and October through November. A foal is born following a 390 day gestation. Foals are able to walk and run within one hour of being born and will stay with their mothers for three years.

THREATS: Humans encroachment is an increasing problem for the zebra. Humans are raising their livestock in the same habitat that the Grevy's zebra uses. This causes competition between the zebra and livestock, pushing the zebras out of this habitat. Poaching is another threat to this species.

PROTECTION: *CITES, Appendix I, Endangered Species Act.

**Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international treaty with more than 144 member countries. Appendix I listed species cannot be traded commercially. Appendix II listed species can be traded commercially only if trade does not harm their survival.*

DIFFERENT SPECIES OF ZEBRA

Three species of zebra still occur in Africa, two of which are found in East Africa. The most numerous and widespread species in East Africa is the Burchell's Zebra, *Equus burchellii*, also known as the common or plains zebra. The other is the Grevy's zebra, *Equus grevyi*, which is not common, and now found mostly in northern Kenya. The third species, the Mountain Zebra, *Equus zebra*, is found in southern and southwestern Africa.

WHICH ZEBRA IS WHICH?

Physical Characteristics: The Grevy's zebra is the largest of the three zebra species. It has a long head and neck, with an erect striped mane running from the top of the head down to the upper back. Its ears are extremely large and rounded. The stripes on Grevy's zebras are more numerous and narrow than those of the plains zebra and do not extend to the belly. In all zebra species, the stripes on the forequarters form a triangular pattern; Grevy's have a similar pattern on the hindquarters, while others have a slanted or horizontal pattern.

Habitat: Burchell's zebras inhabit savannas, from treeless grasslands to open woodlands; they sometimes occur in tens of thousands in migratory herds on the Serengeti plains. Grevy's zebras are now mainly restricted to the dry parts of northern Kenya. Although they are adapted to semi-arid conditions and require less water than other zebra species, these zebras compete with domestic livestock for water and have suffered heavy poaching for their meat and skins.

Behaviour: Unlike other zebra species, Grevy's zebras do not form permanent herds, and social bonds between any two adults seem to be temporary. Males are highly territorial, claiming prime watering and grazing areas with piles of dung called middens. They generally live alone in their territories, except when females move through during mating season. Other zebras, in contrast, typically form female harems that live in one male's territory all year. Non-territorial Grevy's males travel together in groups of two to six animals and are generally tolerated by the dominant stallion in his territory as long as the bachelors do not try to mate. During dry months, many Grevy's zebras migrate to greener mountain pastures, but males on prime territories often remain there year-round.

Diet: Zebras are avid grazers. Both Burchell's and Grevy's zebras are in constant search of green pastures. In the dry season, they can live on coarse, dry grass only if they are within a short distance (usually no farther than 30 kilometres away) from water holes.

Caring for the Young: When a foal is born the mother keeps all other zebras (even the members of her family) away from it for 2 or 3 days, until it learns to recognize her by sight, voice and smell.

While all foals have a close association with their mothers, the male foals are also close to their fathers. They leave their group on their own accord between the ages of 1 and 4 years to join an all-male bachelor group until they are strong enough to head a family.

Predators: Zebras are important prey for lions and hyenas, and to a lesser extent for hunting dogs, leopards and cheetahs. When a family group is attacked, the members form a semicircle, face the predator and watch it, ready to bite or strike should the attack continue. If one of the family is injured the rest will often encircle it to protect it from further attack.

A PLACE IN HISTORY...

The Grevy's zebra is perhaps the most distinctive of the three kinds of zebra (Grevy's, plains, and mountain) and is definitely the largest of the wild equine species. It was this striped horse that was exhibited in Rome by Caracalla, the fierce and aggressive emperor who reigned from 211-217 C.E. and spent big bucks on public baths and circuses. Parades of wild animals were special attractions at chariot races and gladiatorial combats. Grevy's zebras were led by halters around arenas or were harnessed to elaborately decorated carts.

Despite its appearance in ancient Rome, the Grevy's zebra was the last zebra species to gain scientific recognition. In 1882 Menelik II, emperor of Abyssinia, sent a live zebra as a gift to Jules Grévy, president of the French Republic. However, it died shortly after being put on exhibit in the Jardin des Plantes. Its skin was then mounted and put on display in the Natural History Museum in Paris. On closer examination, this museum specimen showed unique stripe patterns. Photos of the skin were sent to London under the name of Grevy's zebra in honor of the French president, a step which led to the eventual delineation and naming of the species, *Equus grevyi*.

GREVY'S ZEBRA FACTS...

- Romans called Grevy's zebras 'hippotigris' and trained them to pull two-wheeled carts for exhibition in circuses.
- The Grevy's zebra was named in honor of Jules Grevy, president of France's Third Republic, to whom the first known specimen of the animal was sent in 1882.
- Grevy's zebras communicate with each other with a loud donkey-like bray.
- Grevy's zebras graze primarily on tough grasses, but they also browse on leaves, which may constitute up to 30 percent of their diet. In consuming coarser grasses, zebras clear off the tops of coarse grasses that are difficult for other herbivores to digest. By preserving zebra habitat, many other species are benefited.
- At first glance zebras in a herd might all look alike, but their stripe patterns are as distinctive as fingerprints are in man. The zebra's striped hide is thought to act as camouflage, helping to break up the outline of the animal especially when the animal is viewed through brush. Stripes may cause confusion, making it hard for a predator to single out an individual in a herd.
- Zebras have good eyesight during the day and at night. They have binocular vision in the front and can probably see in color. They have excellent hearing that can detect distant sounds. Their sense of taste is considered to be quite keen.
- To answer the age-old question...zebras are white with black stripes (rather than the other way around)!

GREVY'S ZEBRA CONSERVATION IN LEWA, KENYA...

Grevy's zebra nursery on Lewa: Lewa, in northern Kenya, is a sanctuary for the greatly endangered Grevy's Zebra. In the past, Grevy's could be found in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Northern Kenya. Now they are considered extinct in Somalia, with a small number in Ethiopia (less than 150) and the remainder in Northern Kenya. Today, Grevy's zebras survive in only a few protected areas. Of the world population (less than 2,300) over 20% are found on Lewa.

Success in Lewa: The number of Grevy's zebras has increased substantially on Lewa. In 1991 the Lewa Grevy's population numbered 259 individuals and today fluctuates between 400-500 animals.

The reasons for the population increase on Lewa are: Lewa is a protected area, so hunting for subsistence or commercial use has been completely eliminated. Also, livestock numbers have been greatly reduced, thereby reducing competition for grazing and water grounds for Grevy's zebras.

In the future, the balanced populations on Lewa and in other protected areas will be vital to ensuring the survival of the Grevy's zebra and will be used as a reservoir for restocking the national parks.

Scientists are working with local communities in Africa to reverse the sharp decline in the number of wild Grevy's zebras. With luck, the combination of captive breeding programs and field conservation efforts will save this beautiful animal before it becomes extinct in the wild.

“Take nothing but photographs & leave nothing but footprints.”

Global Interlink Conservation Update compiled by: MOHIT K. ADVANI

Credits: Defenders Of Wildlife www.defenders.org; Smithsonian National Zoological Park nationalzoo.si.edu; St. Louis Zoo www.stlzoo.org; Out to Africa www.outtoafrika.nl; The World Conservation Union www.iucn.org; Lewa Wildlife Conservancy www.lewa.org