Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable

The common hippopotamus has a grayish-brown, round, bulky body that is set on short, stubby legs. Each foot has four toes and although they are webbed, the toes splay enough to distribute the weight of the animal when it is on land. Their eyes and nostrils are located high on their heads, allowing them to see and breathe while primarily submerged in the water. They produce an oily red substance, which moistens the skin and protects them against the sun.

**Fun Facts:**

1. A male hippopotamus can weigh up to 3,200 kg.
2. The name hippopotamus means “river horse.”
3. The hippopotamus produces its own form of sunscreen, an oily, pink substance that protects it from the sun.
4. Hippos can hold their breath underwater for up to 5 minutes.

**Habitat**

Common hippopotamuses require water that is deep enough for them to fully submerge their bodies. They live in rivers and lakes that are within commuting distance to grassland.

**Diet**

Grass

**Predators**

Lions, crocodiles, humans

**Behavior**

Hippopotamuses are graceful swimmers and are able to hold their breath underwater for several minutes. During the day, they will bask on the shoreline and spend up to 16 hours submerged in rivers and lakes. During the day they are often seen in dense aggregations, especially during the dry season when waters recede. At sunset, hippopotamuses leave the water altogether and travel single file over well-worn paths to forage alone. They feed for 5 to 6 hours a night, traveling as many as 10 km and plucking some 35 kg of grass with their wide, muscular lips.

If threatened on land, hippopotamuses often run for the water and can be dangerous. Males compete to monopolize females and will defend stretches of river or lakeshore as an exclusive territory, asserting their dominance by showering urine and dung in the area with their paddle-shaped tails.

**Breeding**

Hippopotamuses breed year-round. After a gestation period of 7.5 to 8.5 months, hippos typically give birth to one calf.Hippo calves weigh nearly 45 kg at birth and can suckle on land or underwater by closing their ears and nostrils. Each female will give birth once every two years.

**Size**

**Length:** 3.3-3.7 m

**Height:** 1.3-1.65 m

**Weight:** 655-3,200 kg

**Life Span:** Up to 40 years

**Gestation Period:** 7.5-8.5 months

**Average number of offspring:** 1