Savanna animals for kids: 13 grassland animals, sizes and speeds

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Savanna animals for kids: the elephant, giraffe, lion, cheetah, zebra and rhino, plus bison and pronghorn, drawn to scale with sizes and speeds from named sources.

Peabody's savanna page has 13 animals, led by the African elephant, giraffe, lion, cheetah, zebra and white rhinoceros. Every number on it names its source, and the animals with a checked size are drawn to scale beside a child. This post is a tour of the savanna page for grown-ups to read with a child.

What a savanna is

Peabody's words: a savanna is a sea of grass with trees standing far apart. It is warm all year, with a wet season when the grass grows tall and a dry season when it turns gold. Grasslands like the prairies are its cooler cousins, which is why the American bison and the pronghorn are on the page too. Grass-eaters gather in big herds, and the hunters that follow them need speed, because there is nowhere to hide.

Who is on the page

- The grass-eaters: African elephant, giraffe, Grévy's zebra, white rhinoceros, American bison, pronghorn and Aldabra giant tortoise.
- Eats plants and more: the ostrich, which also eats insects.
- The meat-eaters and the little ones: lion, cheetah and Komodo dragon, plus the meerkat, which eats insects, spiders and scorpions.
- The hopper: the red kangaroo, the biggest animal that hops.

Not all of these live in Africa. The bison and pronghorn live in North America, the red kangaroo in Australia, and the Komodo dragon on a few islands in Indonesia. Peabody groups them by the kind of place, not by the continent.

How big?

- Animal: Giraffe · A size: 5.5 m standing height (18 ft) · Who says: Wikidata, from its cited reference
- Animal: Lion · A size: males average 188 kg (about 415 lb) · Who says: US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Animal: Grévy's zebra · A size: 1.2 to 1.5 m at the shoulder (3.9 to 4.9 ft) · Who says: Smithsonian's National Zoo
- Animal: White rhinoceros · A size: 1,500 to 2,400 kg (about 3,300 to 5,300 lb) · Who

says: US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Animal: American bison · A size: 454 to 907 kg (about 1,000 to 2,000 lb) · Who says: National Park Service
- Animal: Ostrich · A size: 2.7 m tall, including the neck (8.9 ft) · Who says: Smithsonian's National Zoo
- Animal: Aldabra giant tortoise · A size: 159 to 250 kg (about 350 to 550 lb) · Who says: Smithsonian's National Zoo
- Animal: Meerkat · A size: 43 to 60 cm, nose to tail tip (17 to 24 in) · Who says: Smithsonian's National Zoo

The African elephant is the biggest land animal. The Smithsonian's Africa's Elephant Kingdom educator guide says adult males can grow to 13 feet (4 metres) tall and weigh 12,000 pounds (about 5,440 kilograms), and the Federal Register gives a median lifespan of 56 years in a well-studied wild population.

How fast?

A top speed is a sprint, not an all-day pace. These are the checked top speeds on the savanna page, with each animal's source:

- Cheetah: 96 to 112 km/h (60 to 70 mph), running, from the Smithsonian's National Zoo.
- Pronghorn: 88.5 km/h (55 mph), running, from the National Park Service at Badlands.
- Ostrich: 69 km/h (43 mph), running, from the Smithsonian's National Zoo.
- American bison: 56.3 km/h (35 mph), running, from the National Park Service at Wind Cave.
- Komodo dragon: 16 to 20 km/h (10 to 12 mph), in brief bursts, from the Smithsonian's National Zoo.

Peabody has no checked top speed for the lion yet, so the lion can't race. That is a gap in our numbers, not a verdict on the lion.

The cheetah's top speed is the highest here, but Peabody's pages add a line about distance. A cheetah can only keep up its top speed for a short dash, and a pronghorn can keep up a fast run for much longer. Stand them side by side in cheetah vs pronghorn and try the race page, where animals race by speed only and nobody is ever hurt. Peabody never shows a fight.

Try this

Pick a pair and ask your child to guess which is bigger before you look: giraffe against zebra, bison against white rhino or ostrich against cheetah. Or open the list of the fastest animals and see where the savanna's runners land. Every page can be read aloud, at three reading levels.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is a savanna the same as a prairie?

Close cousins. A prairie is cooler grassland in North America. Peabody puts both on the savanna page, and each animal's own page says exactly where in the world it lives.

Which savanna animal is the fastest?

Of the ones with a checked number, the cheetah, at 96 to 112 km/h (60 to 70 mph) according to the Smithsonian's National Zoo. Look at the notes before comparing, though. Some speeds are short sprints and some are for animals that can run a long way.

Why is the red kangaroo on the savanna page?

Because Peabody sorts by habitat, and the red kangaroo lives in the dry middle of Australia, in both desert and grassland. Its page is in the desert group too.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads. When the animal talk is done, the library has stories for the car or bedtime.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/savanna-animals-for-kids