Where do animal facts come from? How Peabody checks every number

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Where do animal facts come from? Wikidata, park rangers, NOAA and the National Zoo. How Peabody sources each number, why sites disagree, and 'no checked number yet'.

Every animal number on Peabody comes from a named page, looked for in this order: Wikidata when its statement carries a reference, then United States government pages such as the National Park Service and NOAA Fisheries, and last the Smithsonian's National Zoo. Each number shows the page it came from and the day it was checked. When no page I trust has the number, the animal's page says "no checked number yet" instead.

I built the Animals section this way so that a child, or a teacher, can ask "how do you know?" about any number and get a real answer.

The order, and why

1. Wikidata. A free database anyone can use, which often says where its own numbers came from. I only use a number when it carries a reference.
2. US government pages. Park rangers write about the animals in their parks. NOAA Fisheries covers whales, sharks, turtles and fish. The Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and the Geological Survey cover the rest. These pages belong to everyone.
3. The Smithsonian's National Zoo. It cares for many of these animals. I use it when none of the above had the number, and I write everything in my own words.

How many numbers came from where

Each of the 100 living animals has room for five numbers: length, height, weight, top speed and lifespan. As of 30 October 2026, 295 of those 500 places are filled. Wikidata comes first in my order but rarely carries a reference for these, so it supplied the fewest.

- Source: National Park Service · Numbers: 102 · One example: the peregrine falcon's dive, 322 km/h (200 mph)
- Source: NOAA · Numbers: 61 · One example: the blue whale, 150,000 kg (about 330,000 lb)
- Source: Smithsonian's National Zoo · Numbers: 59 · One example: the cheetah's run, 96 to 112 km/h (60 to 70 mph)
- Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service, including its Federal Register notices · Numbers: 51 · One example: the lion's weight, 188 kg (about 414 lb)
- Source: US Geological Survey · Numbers: 10 · One example: the capybara's weight, 68 kg (about 150 lb)

- Source: USDA (the Forest Service and the pollinator fact sheet) · Numbers: 7 · One example: the peregrine falcon's length, 35.6 to 58.4 cm (14 to 23 in)
- Source: Smithsonian, other pages (an educator guide, the Tropical Research Institute) · Numbers: 3 · One example: the African elephant's height, up to 4 m (13 ft) for males
- Source: Wikidata · Numbers: 2 · One example: the giraffe's standing height, 5.5 m (18 ft)

The other 205 say "no checked number yet." The dinosaur pages work the same way, drawing on the Forest Service, the Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Smithsonian's educator guide and Wikidata. Conservation status comes from Wikidata's IUCN statements, as I explained in what does endangered mean for kids.

What "checked" means

"Checked" is the day I, or a helper, opened the page and read the number off it, word for word. Then a computer opened the same page again and made sure those words were really there. If a page changes later, the number could be out of date, which is why the date is always shown.

Why two sites disagree

Both can be right about different things. A number comes with a note, and the note matters:

- Number: Lion weight, 188 kg (about 414 lb) · What it really is: males only, an average (Federal Register, 2015)
- Number: Cheetah length, 1.78 to 2.26 m (5.8 to 7.4 ft) · What it really is: nose to tail tip, so it includes the tail (Smithsonian's National Zoo)
- Number: Mallard speed, 82.5 km/h (51 mph) · What it really is: the median of GPS-tracked mallards in migratory flight, not a top speed (USGS)
- Number: Brontosaurus length, 21 m (69 ft) · What it really is: really its close cousin Apatosaurus, because that's the page there is (National Park Service)

So one site can say one thing and another something else, and both can be right. Peabody shows one number with its note ("males", "the most measured", "in the wild") and its page.

When there is no number

Sometimes no page I trust has the number, even for a famous animal. The three-toed sloth has no checked length or weight yet. The lion has no checked top speed, which is why cheetah vs lion gets a sizes answer and not a race. I'd rather show a gap than guess.

How to use a fact in a report

Write the number, the page and the day. For example: "The cheetah runs 96 to 112 km/h (Smithsonian's National Zoo, Cheetah, checked 30 October 2026)." That is the habit I most want a child to pick up. My post on how to write an animal report walks through the rest, and

the printable fact cards carry the sources on each card.

Try tonight

Pick any number on an animal page, tap its source mark, open the page it names and find the number there. It's the best lesson in checking a fact I know. The guide where do the numbers come from has the full count and a data file with every number.

Questions grown-ups ask

Does Peabody make the numbers up?

No. Every figure was copied from a page, word for word, by me or a helper, and a script re-checked that the page held those words. Nothing is filled in from memory.

What if I find a mistake?

Open the source and look for the number there. If Peabody's doesn't match the page, tell me at the address at the foot of every page. Pages change and people slip, and I'd like to know.

Why do the dinosaur numbers say "scientists' estimate"?

Because nobody has weighed or measured a living dinosaur. The numbers come from fossils, so the page says so, and many only give "up to".

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026 and has no ads. The library has stories for when you've checked enough numbers for one night.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/where-do-animal-facts-come-from