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Scientists didn't know about okapis until the 1900's because they like to live far away from humans. They live in the deep, dense rainforest of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Okapis are found in the understory layer. You may think that okapis are related to the zebra, based on their looks, but they are really in the giraffe family. Therefore, their nickname is the "forest giraffe".

Okapis are beautiful, but strange mammals with reddish brown fur and stripes on their thighs. They have hooves like their cousin the giraffe. Only the males have horns on their head, and the females have bumps instead. Okapis have extremely long tongues that can reach up to 18 inches. Okapis grow to about five feet tall. The females weigh more than the males! Females weigh from 495 to 770 lbs., compared with 440 to 660 lbs. for the males.

The okapis live a very long life of 20 to 30 years. They spend their days roaming set paths and searching for food. They also spend time with their calves and feeding them. Okapis are herbivores who eat shoots, leaves, buds and twigs. They sometimes eat clay to get minerals they need. They have a four chambered stomach that helps them digest tough food matter. They eat a total of 45 to 60 lbs. each day. Okapis are solitary animals. They mostly live alone or with their young. They come together to mate and to eat together once in awhile.

The moms are pregnant for 15 months, much more than humans. The mothers give birth to one baby at a time and sometimes have twins.

Okapi babies stand up 30 min. after birth .Okapi baby's are 2.6 feet long and weigh 35 lbs. when born.The babies follow their mother's stripes so they don't get lost or hurt. The mom stays with their young for 14 to 16 months so it learns how to thrive on their own .

Okapis have good hearing and large, upright ears to hear predators so they can avoid them.The males have horns to protect them from predators,as well .Okapis have oily fur to keep them from getting wet when rain pours down .Their stripes blend in with their surroundings so they have good camouflage to keep them safe from danger .Okapis' long tongues help them reach leaves on the higher branches.Okapis are very cautious of humans and other animals by staying away from them.To protect their young from predators, okapi babies don't poop until they are 2 months old and stronger. Okapis protect their territory by secreting a tar-like substance from a scent gland behind each foot when they walk. Male okapis spray urine to mark their territory.

Recently, the okapi was switched to list of endangered animals. Before that, it was listed as near threatened. Scientists have found that in the last 18 years, the okapi's population dropped 50%.Which means that the okapi population is decreasing. There are believed to be about 22,000 left in the wild.They are threatened because of habitat loss and poaching even though they have been protected by the law in the Congo for a long time.There is a conservation program trying to protect the endangered species of okapi.